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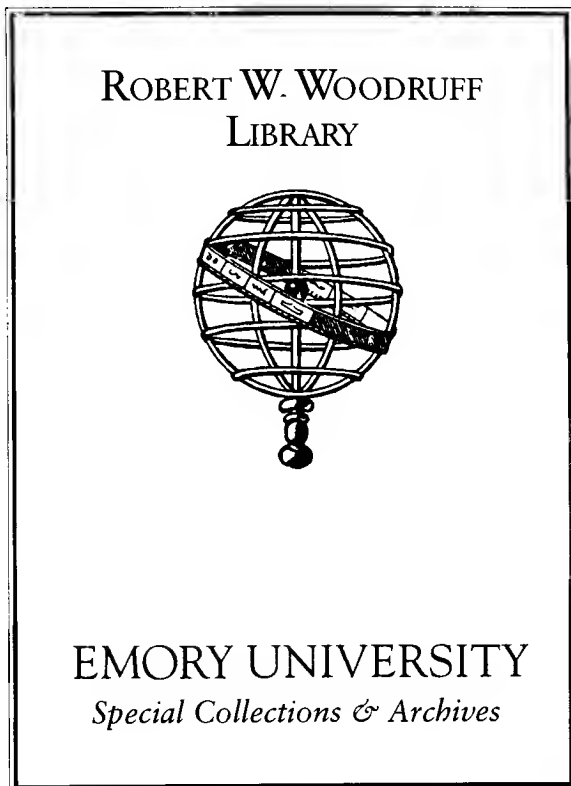
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DU BOISGOBEY'S SENSATIONAL NOVELS.

XV.

THE
ANGEL OF THE CHIMES.

By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

LONDON:
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THE ANGEL OF THE CHIMES.



I.

OLD Paris is disappearing.

The Hospital has been pulled down, but ten years ago it was still casting a gloom over the porch of Notre-Dame, and its dilapidated façade shut out the view of the river from those who came to admire the cathedral immortalised by Victor Hugo — country people or foreigners; these latter, for true Parisians do not much affect show buildings, and do not take it into their heads to ramble about the Cité.

A poor neighbourhood, inhabited by people of very small means, who rarely leave their homes, and do not appreciate the architectural beauties of the church built in the reign of Philippe-Auguste.

At this period, however, the lonely and deserted Place was a scene of animation on Thursdays and Sundays, the days when the hospital patients' friends were admitted; but these receptions, authorised by the governing body, were in strong contrast to those which draw luxurious equipages to the doors of the mansions of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

There was a ceaseless hurrying hither and thither of poor wretches who arrived and took their departure on foot; but in spite of this, on those days the precincts put on an almost festive appearance, and the scene was well worthy of notice.

One fine Thursday in spring, in the year of grace 1874, two gentlemen were feasting their eyes on it from one of the highest windows in the long hospital buildings.

The younger one, in his shirt sleeves, was smoking his pipe as he leaned on the window sill; he was at home, for there were rooms in the hospital set apart for the medical staff, and he had been an occupant during the six months which had elapsed since he had been received on it, after a most brilliant examination.

He was a comely youth, and bore, his state of deshabille notwithstanding, what one might call a look of distinction. He had large black eyes and that pale complexion which romantic women find so attractive.

The other, who was standing at his side, and was not smoking, was a man of about forty, tall, thin, and with a long and bony face, sharply divided by a formidable pair of bristling moustachios *à la* Victor Emmanuel; he wore, moreover, a tight-fitting black frock-coat, of a military cut, and a broad-brimmed bell-shaped hat.

If it had not been for his loyal and open face he might have been taken for one of those Bonapartist agents—Ratapoils, as they were called between the revolution of 1848 and the crisis of 1851.

But his chief resemblance was to Don Quixote, and he must have possessed the courage and the adventurous character of Cervantes's hero, for his friends called him familiarly Don Mériadec, since his true name was Mérédic-Yves-Conan de Mériadec.

He was Breton to the backbone, and a baron withal, but a landless baron, and he attached not the slightest value to his title.

The medico, Albert Daubrac, a native of Agen, was, like all Gascons, cautious, ambitious, and inclined to be dreamy.

But friendship often springs from contrasts, and, in spite of their difference in age, these two men were intimate friends.

"See," said Daubrac, suddenly, "there's the Angel of the chimes crossing the Place. Where's she coming from with her little basket? Ah! I have it—from the flower-market. She has brought back some bunches of cloves."

"That girl who is walking towards the cathedral?" asked Mériadec.

"Yes, the one with a Scotch plaid on her shoulders and a shawl over her fair hair. Have you ever seen anything so pretty at home in Brittany? Such dainty morsels don't grow in the country; they are reared in Paris, in the porters' lodges."

Mériadec took from their case a large pair of opera-glasses, which he carried slung across his shoulder like an English tourist, levelled them on the person pointed out by Daubrac, and said emphatically:

"She is charming. She is like a madonna. Why do you call her the Angel of the chimes?"

"Because her father is bell-ringer at Notre-Dame, and keeper of the towers. They call her the Fairy of the porch about here too. I prefer the name I have given her. It's less poetical, but it's quainter."

"Are you her sweetheart?"

"She has no sweetheart. She is virtuous, my dear fellow. At nineteen, with a face like hers, that's praiseworthy, eh?"

"The more so that she is doubtless not rich."

"She has nothing beyond what she earns by making artificial flowers. Old Verdière is an old soldier, who conscientiously drinks his wages, and gives not a sou to his daughter Rose to dress on. I believe even that she contributes her little to the household expenses."

"She lives with him, then?"

"Exactly so. In the north tower, at I don't know how many steps above ground. She lives in a stone box, where I couldn't pass four-and-twenty hours without an attack of spleen, and she sings all day—is as gay as a lark. She's going home at this moment."

And, in fact, the girl had just disappeared in the Rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame.

"Pity," murmured Don Mériadec. "She was charming to look on."

"I'll wager," cried Daubrac, "that you're thinking already of protecting her against any one who ventures to make an attempt on her virtue. But she is in no need of you. She is quite able to protect

herself. Suppress, then, your knight-errant instincts, and admit that my window affords pleasant visions at times."

"It's certainly more entertaining than mine, looking on the Rue Cassette, through which no one ever passes."

"Then why did you go and live there? Here the scene varies every moment. Look, do you see that couple passing the porch of the cathedral? Two lovers, for certain, and with no good intentions. The woman is wearing a veil as thick as a mask, and is clinging fearfully to her companion, who is holding his face down so that no one shall see it. Those turtle doves are in search of some safe place where they can dupe the husband. And they certainly belong, both of them, to the upper ten. The man's appearance is stylish, and the lady's dress is in the latest fashion."

"Possibly, but they are infinitely less interesting to me than the fair girl."

"For my part, it always amuses me to watch the proceedings of lovers who are trying to conceal themselves. These two, evidently, are forced to make appointments in out-of-the-way places."

"Ah! they're turning into the Rue du Cloître—like Rose Verdière. They're going up the towers, perhaps."

"What a ridiculous idea!"

"Not so ridiculous. It must be a splendid place up there for tender speeches. Heaven for a roof, and no other witnesses besides the swallows. There's something in that idea, and I intend to put it into practice the next time I make a conquest in society."

Mériadec directed his glasses towards the top of the tower, and said: "There are no heads to be seen at present above the balustrade which crowns the bell-tower."

"The only one which people are allowed to ascend," interrupted the house-surgeon. "I'll bet that our lovers are going there. It would be a joke to follow them."

"I'm not anxious to disturb their tête-à-tête."

"We shall see the Fairy of the porch on our way. The room she lives in is on the steps of the tower. The staircase is closed by a gate at which visitors must ring, and very frequently it is she who comes to open it, for old Verdière doesn't care about disturbing himself."

"I should be delighted to have a close view of the Angel of the chimes," said Mériadec; "but to climb up there——"

"That's nothing, with your long legs, and besides, we shall not be obliged to go up to the leaden cap which covers the south tower. We can stop at the gallery which crosses the façade, and await the veiled lady. I particularly wish to see her face to face."

"It's not certain that we shall meet her. She and her companion may very well have continued their sentimental journey through the streets of the Cité."

"Very well, we shall still have our climb, which will give us an appetite. There's not a cloud in the sky, the wind is soft; we shall have a bird's-eye view of Paris, and with your famous glasses you will be able to recognise your house in the Rue Cassette. I am not on duty in the hospital till three o'clock, so I have all that time to restore the circulation in my legs."

"And I have nothing to do."

"Well, come with me. You will have a chance, perhaps, of performing a deed of knightly valour—a persecuted woman to defend, an abandoned infant to succour."

"That hope decides me," said Mériadec, laughing.

"Come along, then; I knew you would come," murmured Daubrac.

The two friends left the window. The surgeon put on a fashionable-cut jacket, a low hat, which well suited his face, and thrust Don Mériadec out on to the staircase.

They descended eighty stairs, and, having crossed the peristyle of the hospital, which was crowded with visitors, emerged into the Place.

"There! I was certain of it!" cried Daubrac, lifting his eyes to the façade. "They are on the middle gallery already. The lady has raised her veil, which is floating in the wind. Take a look through your glasses, and tell me if she is pretty."

Don Mériadec took his glasses from their case, but, before he could make use of them, the lady, who had leant for a moment over the balustrade, had already disappeared with her companion.

"Total eclipse! Put your glasses away and let us try to make up for lost time. The tower steps are at the end of the Rue du Cloître. Let us hasten there."

"Let me just have a look at that marvellous façade," said Mériadec, who was never in a hurry.

"You've seen enough of it from my window."

"I should never be weary of admiring it, especially the rose-window in the centre. The sun is lighting it up now, and the panes are flaming like a fire."

"To the deuce with your admiration! I would rather see a pretty face than a rose-window."

"Oh, you can't appreciate poetry. But at least you'll grant me five minutes to engrave this splendid picture on my memory. What a pity I'm not an artist!"

"Unfortunately you're only a fool. Did ever any one rave like that over a building? It's a case of admiration on the brain. You must have an eye to yourself, my friend, if you don't wish to end your days in the Sainte-Anne Asylum. And before I have to administer cold shower-baths to you there, I am going to allow you your liberty, however much you may gape at the rooks up on the towers. I don't want to miss my blue-veiled stranger."

As he spoke Daubrac had taken his friend's arm and attempted to drag him off. In vain. Mériadec was stubborn as a mule, and it was a case of waiting until his ecstatic fit was over.

"You won't miss her," said he; "I can see her now on the summit of the tower."

"True, upon my word!" cried Daubrac; "she has not taken long to mount up there, and I begin to suspect she is English. It's only English-women who go up steps four at a time. Ah! she is no longer to be seen; she is looking at another aspect of the panorama, unless, indeed, she and her lover are seated on the middle of the platform, engaged in tender conversation. We sha'n't disturb them, but when

they come down they are bound to pass close by us, for the passage is not broad—and I hope, for your sake, that the little Fairy of the porch will open the gate of the spiral staircase for us.”

This time Don Mériadec needed no further urging to follow his young companion, who bent his steps towards the Rue du Cloître.

They had not gone ten paces when they heard cries, and saw visitors running out of the hospital. The crowd rushed towards Notre-Dame, and a large assemblage quickly formed between the foot of the south tower and the Seine.

“Quand le peuple s’assemble ainsi
C’est toujours sur quelque ruine.”

murmured Mériadec, who knew much of Musset by heart.

“An accident !” said the surgeon. “That’s in my line.”

“Some one who has thrown himself from the tower.”

“It looks like it to me. Let us hope it is not the lady in the blue veil.”

“What an idea !” cried Mériadec. “A woman who is going to commit suicide doesn’t take her lover with her.”

“At any rate, let us go and see,” said Daubrac philosophically.

“The person who has just performed that perilous feat has no longer any need of my attention ; but it is my business to pronounce if life is extinct.”

On coming up with the crowd the two friends were soon able to form an opinion on what had happened, for loud comments were being made on it by the bystanders. They heard such expressions as the following :

“She is young still, and must have been pretty before crushing her face on the pavement.”

“At any rate, it’s not want which has made her take her life, for she is well enough dressed.”

“And she has a watch-chain, diamond earrings, a gold bracelet——”

“If they are not imitation——”

Daubrac called out that he was a doctor ; the crowd parted to let him pass, and Mériadec accompanied him.

A circle had been formed round a corpse, and this corpse was that of a woman.

She had fallen on her head ; the skull was smashed into fragments, like a flower-pot, and the face, shattered by the shock, was absolutely unrecognisable.

No one volunteered to touch this bleeding corpse. The surgeon went down on one knee to examine it more closely, and rose after an instant, saying to the loungers :

“You can see that she died on the spot. Go and fetch a stretcher from the hospital, and send the police here.”

Several willing men left the crowd, and the surgeon whispered in his friend’s ear :

“Upon my word, I believe it is she.”

“The woman who crossed the precincts arm-in-arm with a gentleman, and whom we thought we saw up on the tower?” asked Mériadec.

“Yes, of course, it’s the same dress. The mantle, the fashionable hat—nothing is wanting except the blue veil, which was no doubt lost during her fall.”

"But the gentleman who was accompanying her?" objected Mériadec.

"They must have had a violent scene on the platform. Perhaps he told her that he must break off with her, and in a fit of despair she leaped over the parapet. It would be the work of a moment, and the lover would not have time to hold her back. If he is not here yet, it is because the way is long by the stairs—this unfortunate woman took the shortest one—but in a few moments we shall see the man rushing up in a frantic state, and shall witness his despair."

"I don't like the idea," growled Mériadec. "The sight before our eyes now is horrible enough."

"You are going to be delivered from it. I see the police, and the stretcher will not be long—we are close to the hospital. I will accompany the body, and have it placed in the dead-house, and then I will join you again, and, if you like, we will go and tell Rose Verdière all about it. She can't have seen the fall, but perhaps she opened the gate to the couple we noticed crossing the precincts. So we have an excellent excuse for making the acquaintance of the Angel of the chimes."

Two policemen and an inspector who were on duty in the neighbourhood arrived in a leisurely way, and two of the attendants, bearing a portable bed, came out of the hospital.

"You were right," said Mériadec. "Here is the lover coming as fast as his legs can carry him."

"That fellow gesticulating there? Never! In the first place, the lover can't come from that direction, and besides, he had on a high-crowned hat, and the individual you point out wears simply a red cap. It's only some inquisitive fellow who is coming to join the rest of the loungers."

The man approaching from the bridge spanning the small arm of the Seine had all the appearance of a bearer of news, for he was waving his arms in the air, and calling out something which did not reach the ears of the two friends. He joined the crowd at the same moment as the police and the stretcher-bearers. He thrust himself into the first row, elbowing every one aside, and, addressing himself to the inspector:

"What are you doing here?" he said, choking for breath. "The woman is dead; you can't bring her to life again, and if you stand there looking at her, the murderer will escape."

"What! the murderer?" cried Mériadec and Daubrac in chorus.

"Yes, the wretch who flung her from the top of the tower."

"What are you chattering about?" said the inspector.

"I tell you I saw it done. I was fishing from the bank on the other side of the river, and as I didn't get a bite I was amusing myself by looking at Notre-Dame; I was looking up and I could see quite plainly on the platform a man and a woman; suddenly the man bent down, took the woman by the legs, lifted her up, and toppled her over."

"The deuce! you've got good eyes," growled the inspector.

"Excellent ones; and if you won't believe me, come with me—he hasn't had time to come down—we shall meet him on the stairs,"

"The gentleman is right," said Daubrac. "If it is a case of suicide only, it is important to interrogate the man who was present."

"If you refuse to come," continued the man in the red cap, "I'll go without you and capture him myself."

"Mind your own business. I know my duty, and I don't know who you are."

"Jean Fabreguette, artist, residing at No. 19, Rue de la Huchette."

"And I," added Daubrac, "am house-surgeon at the Hospital. My friend here is the Baron de Mériadec, and we shall recognise the man perfectly well, for we saw him cross the Place arm-in-arm with this woman."

The inspector still hesitated, but he saw that the crowd assembled round the corpse was about to move in a body towards the entrance to the towers, and he judged it best to take the same direction.

"Have the body removed, and come with me," he said to his men.

The attendants placed the corpse upon the stretcher, and prepared to remove it to the hospital. Thereupon the loungers dispersed; some followed the stretcher, others the inspector, who walked between Mériadec and Daubrac.

Fabreguette walked in front of the procession. The crowd would certainly have invaded the tower if the inspector had not placed his two men at the entry, after having given them orders to let no one pass but the two friends and the painter, who followed him up the spiral staircase, in which two persons could only have passed by standing sideways.

They soon arrived in front of a gate, by the side of which opened a short passage in the thickness of the wall, leading to the keeper's rooms.

The inspector rang, and Rose appeared.

"Do you wish to see the towers, gentlemen?" she asked in a soft voice, a voice which went straight to Mériadec's heart.

"That's not the question," replied the inspector roughly. "I must speak to your father."

"My father?—he is ill."

"Come, come, I know all about that. He has had a drop too much. That doesn't matter. I want to see him; open the gate."

The girl obeyed, and the inspector entered Verdière's dwelling. The others were satisfied with passing the gate, and Daubrac said with a smile:

"Quite well, mademoiselle?"

Rose, who often met him in the precincts, recognised him, and answered, blushing slightly:

"Quite well, sir, thank you; but tell me——"

"What we have come to do in your tower? It's quite simple; we are in search of a gentleman who passed here twenty minutes ago with a lady."

"I had just come in when they arrived. I had been to take some work."

"Then, you saw them?"

"Hardly. My father, who is a great sufferer, had left the gate open so as not to be disturbed, and I have just now shut it. For that reason

the lady and gentleman were able to pass without stopping. They will pay as they come down."

"You think they are up there still, then?"

"Certainly."

"You are wrong. The lady is no longer there. She has thrown herself off the bell-tower, or else has been thrown off."

"Ah, good heavens!"

"Do you understand now why we are looking for the gentleman?"

Before Rose, who was pale with emotion, had time to answer, the inspector reappeared at the entrance of the corridor, muttering curses against the keeper.

"I was certain of it," he growled; "he is dead drunk, the beast! There's a man who gets wages for doing nothing! He is paid to look after the towers, and when his daughter is not here people can walk in and out as they please. So much the worse for him. I shall mention it in my report."

"Oh, sir, I beg you——"

"Silence!" said Daubrac in an undertone. "There is some one coming down."

Every one was silent, and the sound of steps was distinctly heard at the top of the staircase, the steps of a well-booted man in a great hurry to be gone.

The inspector took hold of Rose's arm, thrust her into the keeper's room, made a sign to the gentlemen to stand close, so as to bar the passage, and planted himself alone on a step in front of the gate. A moment later the individual who was coming down the stairs appeared, and stopped short on perceiving him.

Daubrac and Mériadec recognised him immediately. There was not the smallest doubt that it was the companion of the lady in the blue veil. He had a fine face and elegant bearing, and the air and appearance of a man belonging to the best society. He appeared annoyed at finding the way blocked, but he waited patiently for the group to stand aside and let him pass.

His manner changed when the inspector called to him to advance.

"Is your business with me?" he asked, drawing himself up proudly.

"Yes, with you. I have a word to say to you. Come into the keeper's room with me."

"You mistake me for another, doubtless. I am willing to follow you and to listen to what you have to say. But have done quickly, if you please."

The inspector pointed out the entry of the passage to him, and ushered him in first. Old Verdière, stretched on his bed, was sleeping the heavy sleep of a drunkard. His daughter was standing at his bedside. Mériadec, Daubrac, and the artist followed the inspector, who began thus:

"It was you who went up with a lady?"

The stranger grew pale, and replied curtly:

"What is that to you?"

"These gentlemen saw you cross the precincts arm-in-arm. This young lady saw you pass up the staircase outside the room in which we are now standing."

"And supposing it were true?"

"Then you admit it?"

"What? By what right do you question me?"

"I ask you where is that woman?"

"She has gone."

"Alone?"

"Yes; if you don't believe me, go up and look."

"Oh, it's not worth while. I know where she is, and I'm going to take you to her. We shall see if you recognise her."

These last words evidently made the stranger uneasy.

"It seems to me you are poking fun at me," said he, in a less confident voice. "I demand a definite explanation. What do you want with me?"

"You will know presently. Walk in front of me," concluded the inspector, motioning to the stranger, who replied:

"Be it so, I yield to force. But I declare to you that you shall pay dearly for your abuse of authority. Where do you propose to take me?"

"Not far. To the Hospital."

"To the Hospital!" cried the stranger. "Has an accident happened to—"

"To the lady?" sneered the inspector. "Why, yes. Does it astonish you?"

"A serious accident?"

"Humbug! you know all about it."

"I know so little that I beg you to take me to her quickly."

"So hurried? Don't be alarmed; we shall not be long. Go down, gentlemen, and tell my men to keep order in the crowd," added the inspector, addressing his three companions. And to Rose Verdière:

"As for you, if your father gets turned off, it will teach him to leave the gate of the staircase open."

He had had some difficulty in believing in the crime denounced by the man in the red cap, this excellent inspector, but he was all eagerness now, and did not doubt that he had laid hands on the murderer. He was even in hopes that the capture would obtain him promotion.

Mériadec and Daubrac did not know what to think, but Fabreguette was triumphant.

"Well," said he, "I was right to take it up. If it hadn't been for me, that fool of an inspector would still be holding forth over the corpse, and the murderer would have escaped; whilst now, thanks to me, we have got him."

"Are you certain of that?" growled Daubrac. "This gentleman hasn't got the look of a villain."

"And why? Because he is finely dressed? That proves nothing."

"He doesn't seem to be much alarmed," observed Mériadec.

"It's his cue to be bold; but we shall see how he looks presently when he is placed face to face with his victim."

"Do you think, then, that you will be allowed to be present?"

"Certainly; I am the only eye-witness, my presence is indispensable," said the artist, bridleing.

In the midst of such conversation, carried on in undertones, they

arrived at the door, and Fabreguette took upon himself to give the two police officers their chief's orders.

Others had arrived on the scene, for the news of the tragic occurrence had spread through the Cité with the rapidity of lightning, and the commissary of police of the neighbourhood had just heard of it from the zealous people who are always to the fore on such occasions.

But the crowd had increased, and the police had some difficulty in keeping it in check during the short journey from the Rue du Cloître to the Hospital.

They surrounded the prisoner, who marched with head erect at the inspector's side. His denouncer and the two friends helped to keep guard, and in spite of frequent rushes the procession reached the steps of the hospital without being broken.

The commissary, girt with his sash, awaited them under the peristyle. He ordered the police to keep out inquisitive people, after having allowed the four who were interested to enter, and then conferred with the inspector, who informed him as to the whole affair.

During this colloquy Mériadec and Daubrac had time to examine the accused more closely than they had been able to do in a badly-lighted staircase.

He appeared to be about thirty-five; he was very swarthy and very strongly built; he had a long moustache, and whiskers cut military fashion on a level with his ears.

"He looks like an officer in mufti," said Daubrac in a very low voice.

At this moment the commissary, having heard his subordinate's report to the end, walked into the room adjoining the peristyle, after having given orders that the others should be shown in there.

When this had taken place they found the commissary seated at a table, and the prisoner began to speak without waiting to be questioned.

"Sir," said he, hardly controlling his passion, "I hope you are about to put an end to an odious and absurd persecution. Your men have dragged me here like a malefactor, and I have not been able to obtain from them the slightest explanation. Be good enough to inform me of what I am accused."

"I am about to inform you, if so be that you are ignorant of it," said the commissary severely, "but first of all I must request you to answer the questions I am about to put to you."

"I know already what these questions are. You are going to ask me, as this inspector has already done, whether I went up the towers with a lady? Well, I don't deny it."

"That would be difficult. Several witnesses saw you. Why did you go there?"

"For the same reason as many other visitors, to admire the view of Paris."

"Then, you went up on to the platform which surmounts the south tower?"

"No, sir. The ascent would have been too much for my companion. We stopped at the gallery which runs across the façade of the cathedral, at the base of the two towers."

"Did you stay there long?"

"On the contrary, a very short time. A quarter of an hour, at most. There was a very disagreeable wind, and the lady could not bear it, so she decided to come down."

"I understand that; but what I do not understand is, that you did not do as she did. Why did you stop on this gallery where the wind was so disagreeable?"

The stranger paused before answering, and concluded by saying like a man who could find no better explanation, "The wind did not trouble me."

The reason was such a bad one that the two friends exchanged a glance which signified: "He is becoming embarrassed, he will convict himself."

"What!" cried the commissary, "you take a lady for a walk, you go up on to this gallery with her, she finds it disagreeable, wishes to leave it, and you let her go alone! In a word, you desert her. Confess that it is impossible on the part of a man who belongs, like you, to the upper classes."

"It is nevertheless true; she had her reasons for going without me."

"What reasons?"

"I do not know them."

"So then, she left you thus abruptly and without saying why! Astonishing!"

"A truce to jests, sir! I do not intend to answer questions of which I cannot see the object."

"At least you can tell me if this lady was your wife?"

"I am not married."

"Then, you were with your mistress?"

"Think so, if it pleases you."

"And this mistress you are afraid of compromising by further explanations. It is understood you refuse to give her name?"

"Absolutely."

"She is no doubt married, and, in keeping silence as to her, you are acting as a gallant man. Very well. I can only warn you that your discretion will not prevent me from knowing who she is."

The stranger winced. The commissary had touched him on a weak spot, and he continued in an almost benevolent voice:

"I shall know it before the end of the day; so you would do well to tell me her name—to tell me alone. If you are really not guilty, I can keep your secret, whilst if you persist in maintaining silence——"

"Guilty of what? Ten times have I asked your officer and you. I have surely the right to know before I answer you. Once more, with what am I charged?"

"With having murdered that woman."

"Really, that is too much. I cannot suppose that you are jesting in the performance of your magisterial functions. I prefer to believe that I am the victim of an error, and I have no need of justification. I shall wait till the mistake is rectified."

"Then, you refuse absolutely to give me any explanation?"

"More than ever."

The commissary rose, and made a sign to the inspector, who went and opened a small door at the further end of the room.

"Enter," said he, making a sign to the prisoner.

Then, addressing the three witnesses :

"Be good enough to follow me, gentlemen."

The stranger walked towards the door without betraying the slightest sign of emotion, and was the first to enter a room where there were only the four walls and, in the middle, a large table, on which lay a corpse covered with a cloth.

"Very good," said he calmly. "You are going to confront me with a corpse. You might have dispensed with this display, sir, for it has no terrors for me."

On a sign from the commissary the inspector lifted the cloth, and disclosed the woman lying on her back.

The stranger grew pale and recoiled with horror, but he quickly overcame this instinctive movement. He hurried up to the corpse, looked closely at the disfigured features, and said, speaking to himself :

"I don't know her. I thought for a moment it was she. I was mistaken, thank God !"

There was a moment of silence. The commissary, who saw his plan had failed, bit his lips ; the two friends did not know what to make of the prisoner's *sang froid*, and Fabreguette himself began to doubt that he had laid hands on the murderer.

"I understand now," said the stranger. "You suspect me of having thrown this unfortunate woman from the top of the tower. I know not whether she has committed suicide, or whether any one pushed her, but I am certain of never having seen her."

Instead of disputing this statement, the commissary began to question the witnesses, after having taken their names and addresses. Daubrac and Mériadec declared that they recognised the accused from having seen him crossing the precincts arm-in-arm with a lady, but they were not sure that the body was that of this lady.

Fabreguette repeated that he had seen from the bank, where he was fishing, the scene on the platform : a man taking up a struggling woman by the legs and launching her into space. But he had been too far off to distinguish faces. He was therefore unable to swear that the author of the crime was the gentleman arrested on the spiral staircase. These statements proved nothing against the stranger, who listened to them with visible satisfaction. But the commissary would not admit himself defeated.

"You have heard," said he ; "these gentlemen will not take upon themselves to affirm that it was you, but I shall be able to establish the identity of the woman with ease. Even supposing that no papers or cards should be found on her, she will certainly be recognised at the Morgue, where I am about to send her. I do not ask you her name again, since you profess not to know it, but nothing, I suppose, prevents you from telling me yours. What is your name ? Where do you live ? Of what profession are you ?"

"I decline to answer these questions, or any others," replied the stranger resolutely.

"Be it so. The examining magistrate will no doubt be able to discover who you are."

"I shall inform him, perhaps. To you I shall give no information, especially here, in the presence of those who had me arrested."

"It only remains for me, then, to send you to the Dépôt. I shall take you there myself. Inspector, call a cab. You will see afterwards that the body of this woman is taken immediately to the Morgue. You, gentlemen, can withdraw, but kindly hold yourself at the disposal of the examining magistrate who will deal with the affair. You will probably be summoned to the Palais to-morrow."

This intimation from the commissary was equivalent to an order, and the three witnesses immediately left the room where the corpse lay.

To tell the truth, they were not sorry to take their departure, if it were only to exchange ideas as to the scenes at which they had been present.

They stopped under the peristyle of the hospital to discuss them, and it was found that they all three held different opinions as to the strange affair in which they had played such important parts.

Fabreguette, who had been the prime mover in it, persisted in maintaining that the man arrested was the murderer; Daubrac pronounced no opinion on it; and Mériadec was inclined to believe that the gentleman had been the victim of an error. The surgeon put an end to the discussion by saying that it was time for his evening rounds, and that he must go to his post.

Mériadec remained alone with this singular artist who spent his time in fishing in the Seine, instead of painting in his studio, and they descended into the Place, which was still thronged with spectators.

Fabreguette seemed very much disposed to make fuller acquaintance, but Mériadec had no great inclination for this. He was rather vexed at the fellow for having caused him to embark on an adventure in which he was afraid that he had lost his way from the first step, and he had no great disposition to prolong the interview. He soon found that it was no easy task to get rid of the man in the red cap, and he had to listen to endless absurd talk, not to mention the personal history of this genuine Bohemian, living from hand to mouth, careless and gay as a bird; an urchin of twenty-five, without vice and full of good meaning, but with nothing solid about him. Fabreguette dwelt so much on this topic that he finally interested Mériadec, who invited him to call on him in the Rue Cassette.

They were destined to meet elsewhere, since they were both to be called as witnesses, and the good-hearted baron thought that he might be able to lend a helping hand to this poor devil of an unknown artist, and get him out of the difficulties in which his existence was spent. It only needed some such reason as this to throw his doors open to him.

They parted good friends. Fabreguette, without bestowing further thought on the results of the stranger's arrest, went off to seek his fishing-rod which he had left on the bank, and left Mériadec to his own reflections.

They were gloomy enough, those reflections of Daubrac's friend; for, unlike the truant-playing artist, he had taken the affair to heart, and feared that he had contributed to the locking-up of an innocent man.

This gentleman, whom the commissary had so glibly ordered off to the Dépôt, had defended himself with every appearance of an honest man.

Mériadec reflected, too, that the police had gone very clumsily to work to find out the real truth of this strange affair. In the first place, they had unhesitatingly accepted Fabreguette's story, who professed that he had witnessed the scene on the platform from a great distance, and who might possibly be mistaken. Perhaps it was only a case of suicide; and if the woman had really been precipitated from the tower by guilty hands, they ought, before all, to have made certain that the lady in the blue veil and her companion were the only persons up there at the time of the catastrophe.

Now, they had simply laid violent hands on the first individual they had met on the steps, at the moment when he was coming down. The ill-advised visitor, it is true, had given his answers in a way which aggravated suspicion, and afterwards he had even gone so far as to refuse to give any explanation to the commissary who was interrogating him. But that was no reason why he should be guilty. Mériadec was inclined to believe that he would completely clear himself before the examining magistrate without further loss of time.

In the meantime, and before being himself called before the said magistrate, Mériadec thought of completing, for his own personal satisfaction, an investigation which had seemed to him much too summary, and the idea at once struck him to go and visit what in judicial language is styled the scene of the crime.

Perhaps the desire to see the Angel of the chimes again had something to do with the resolution which he immediately took to climb up to the platform, which he could not reach without passing the keeper's room. Rose Verdière had charmed him, and he felt himself drawn towards the fair young girl by a feeling which he could not yet define, but which had a strong resemblance to incipient love.

At thirty-eight, which was his age, it was almost ridiculous to fall in love at first sight with a girl whose father he might have been. But the last of the Mériadec's was of a very tender disposition, and as ready to become enamoured of two pretty eyes as to perform an act of devotion to a fellow man.

It was another point of resemblance with Don Quixote, the redresser of wrongs, and the lover of Dulcinea. His life, like that of his hero, had been passed in defending the oppressed, and in adoring women, who troubled their heads but little about him.

He was born in the heart of Brittany, in the country of Concarneau, of a father who came of an old stock and who wished to make of him a country gentleman, living in his manor house and improving his land, and this father had prevented him from following his vocation. Young Mériadec would have liked to have been either a sailor or a soldier; he had to resign himself to do nothing but hunt, ride, and dream of love and war. When he became his own master he had passed the age when he could have entered the army, and had to content himself with travelling in search of adventures which never happened. In 1870 he volunteered, but he never had a chance to distinguish himself, and after the war he took up his quarters in Paris, where he led a life in conformity with his tastes.

He had sold his estates, deposited the money in the Bank of France, and taken a small suite of rooms in the Rue Cassette, where he received no one, and was waited upon by a housekeeper. His sole occupation consisted in seeking the unfortunate who were in need of his assistance. It was his desire to take the place of "the man in the little blue cloak" in the legend, and it was in visiting the hospitals that he had formed the acquaintance of Daubrac.

But hitherto he had only met with that class of misery which could be relieved without further trouble than that of opening his purse-strings. Certainly he occasionally had an opportunity of risking his life in stopping a runaway horse, or in plunging into the water to fish out some poor wretch who had thrown himself in; but these incidents did not suffice to satisfy the thirst for sacrificing himself which devoured him.

His dreams were of impossible generosity, and the incessant turmoil which was always agitating his brain kept the excitable Breton in a state of fever which was fatal to his peace of mind. He was wearing away his heart, by dint of pouring it out in noble causes, and his brain, by always keeping it filled with heroic projects.

He dreamed, too, of loving and being loved, but he found no object on which to vent the ardour which consumed him; for he was not the kind of man to enter upon those passing connections which satisfy most Parisians, and the years passed without bringing him calm.

The encounter with Rose Verdière happened most opportunely, and by endeavouring to see her again, he had hopes of discovering some method of assisting an unjustly accused man.

After Fabreguette's departure, then, he bent his steps in the direction of the Rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame.

The excitement had ceased, and the precincts were beginning to assume their wonted aspect, although there was still an assembly of people round the spot which the unhappy woman had inundated with her blood.

Two policemen had remained on guard at the entry of the towers, and Mériadec said to himself that they had probably received orders to allow no one to pass in or out. He concluded from this, that if the real criminal were still on the tower, he would not be able to escape without giving the explanations which would certainly be demanded of him; but that, on the other hand, they would not allow him, Mériadec, to pass without an authorisation for which he did not care to ask the commissary.

He was about to abandon his project when he suddenly remembered that there was another entry into the staircase from the nave. He retraced his steps, entered the church, saw on his left a notice pointing out the entry to the towers, and ascended without further loss of time.

The police posted in the street did not see him, and in a few strides he arrived at the gate, which he was not sorry to find closed.

If it had been open he would not have ventured to enter the keeper's room, whilst if he rang he would certainly summon the young girl, and she would not refuse a chat with him.

As he had foreseen, she came out on hearing the bell, and hastened

to open the gate, but he was struck with the change in her face. She was pale, and it was easy to see that she had been weeping.

"What is the matter?" he asked affectionately.

"Nothing," she murmured; "this scene has upset me. Is it true, then, sir, that that poor woman——"

"Too true, alas! I have just seen her shattered body."

"And that man threw her over?"

"I doubt it; but he is in custody, and I do not know whether he will be able to clear himself. I hope so, for his own sake and for yours, for, if he were guilty, your father would perhaps be held responsible."

"That is what I fear, and if he lost his situation, I do not know what would become of us."

"You would always have a friend," said Mériadec eagerly. "And I beg you will count on me. All I possess is at your disposal, and I am ready to defend you against any one who seeks to do you harm. Pardon me for speaking to you like this, without having the good fortune to possess your acquaintance; and do not attribute any intentions to me but those of placing myself at your service in case of need. Daubrac will tell you that I am an honourable man, incapable of abusing your confidence."

The young girl knit her brows at this unexpected remark, but recovered her self-possession on looking at Mériadec's open face, and said with a smile:

"I thank you, sir, and I should not be afraid of having recourse to you. But was it to offer me your protection that you took the trouble to climb up here?"

"No, I confess," said Mériadec frankly, "I wanted to go up on the towers and make certain that there was no one there. That is what the inspector should have done before arresting the first man he met on the stairs. Will you allow me to go up?"

"Certainly, on condition that you will say nothing about it. They would find the same fault with me as they did with my father."

"No one shall know even that I have spoken to you. I entered by the door in the nave, and I will return the same way. I will give you an account of my expedition as I come down."

Having said this Mériadec began to mount the stone steps. Thanks to the long legs with which nature had provided him, he was not long in ascending, and he ran up so quickly that on arriving on the gallery he was obliged to halt to recover his breath.

This gallery was deserted, and, as the prisoner had said, the wind blew there in most disagreeable fashion.

However, Mériadec entered it after a short pause. On arriving at the middle he leant on the balustrade, lifted his eyes towards the summit of the towers, saw no one there and turned round again to look down on the Place where groups of loiterers still lingered. This sight had little interest for him; but, on leaning over the balustrade of granite, he made a singular discovery.

Immediately below him, and clinging to a projecting gargoyle, floated a blue veil which he at once recognised. It was undoubtedly the one worn by the woman whom he had seen crossing the precincts

arm-in-arm with the man who was charged with her murder, and Mériadec at once asked himself how this veil could have rested there. The crime having been committed on the platform of the south tower, it must have fallen on the same side as the unhappy victim, and supposing that it had become detached during the fall, the wind, which was blowing from the north, could not have carried it on to the façade, which looks towards the west. However that might be, it was a piece of evidence of sufficient importance for Mériadec to take the trouble to obtain possession of it. His stick had a handle in the shape of a crook, and the gargoyle was within its reach. By an adroit manœuvre he managed to draw the veil towards him and make a close examination of it. But he discovered nothing peculiar about it. All these strips of gauze are much alike. This one was quite new, and must have been bought that day, for a tiny label was still attached to the cord which had served to fasten it to the hat, a label bearing in handwriting the price of the veil.

Mériadec carefully put the veil away in his pocket, resolving to show it to the magistrate, and, encouraged by this find, he continued his voyage of discovery.

The staircase he had followed is in the north tower, but in order to proceed further it is necessary to traverse the gallery and continue the ascent by the south one, where hang the bells in the famous belfry.

Mériadec was about to enter it, when there emerged a child whose appearance astonished him.

This child, who stared fixedly at him, might have been eight or nine years old. He wore an old cap and a grey blouse, like a printer's apprentice; but his face was not that of a Parisian urchin. He had the white complexion of an aristocrat; large blue eyes, very lively and wide open; soft, fair hair, cut square on his forehead; and a haughty demeanour which contrasted strongly with his dress.

"What are you doing here, my boy?" asked Mériadec, much puzzled.

The child coloured, drew up his little figure, and answered in words which the baron did not understand; but which, from the tone in which they were uttered, were evidently those of resentment.

"What language do you speak, my little friend?" continued Mériadec, more and more puzzled.

"My own," answered the boy, in French; "but I know yours, too, and I forbid you to be so familiar. I do not know you."

Mériadec fell in his own esteem; but he began to see that this strange little mannikin might give him useful information, perhaps even throw some light on the mystery which he was anxious to penetrate, and he had no difficulty in deciding to humour him with kindness.

"Don't be angry, young man," said he, smiling. "I am in search of some people who came up here, and perhaps I may ask you if you have seen them—a lady and a gentleman?"

"I have seen no one but papa and mamma," replied the child. "I came with them, but I was too tired to go up there."

"But they have gone?"

"Yes; I am waiting for them. Mamma told me to amuse myself with looking at the great bell, but I have had enough of it; I have seen a bigger one at Moscow."

"You are Russian?"

"Yes; you are surprised at that, because I am dressed like the Paris urchins. I wanted to disguise myself for a joke. I thought it was your carnival time—papa told me so. He was wrong, and I don't find it a joke at all. But this evening I shall put on my pretty new clothes again."

Mériadec was stupefied with astonishment. He saw that this poor little fellow's parents had brought him there with the intention of abandoning him, and that the father had thrown his wife from the platform.

This wretch was assuredly not the man whom the police commissary had just sent off to the Dépôt, since the couple whom Mériadec and Daubrac had seen passing were not accompanied by a child.

But what course was he to take? It was impossible to tell the child that his mother had just been murdered—and by whom? The good-hearted baron resolved to do that only at the last extremity, but he did not give up the idea of discovering the murderer, who doubtless had not had time to gain the street.

"They can't be long coming down," said he in his kindest voice. "Shall we go and meet them?"

The child scanned Mériadec, and asked :

"Who are you? I would not go with every one."

"I am the Baron de Mériadec."

"Then, you are a gentleman. I am willing to go with you."

"Thanks for your confidence in me," answered the good Breton, who could not overcome his astonishment at hearing such language from a child of nine.

He made him go first and had some difficulty in following him, so active was the young Russian. They found no one on the platform. Mériadec expected this, for he did not suppose that the murderer would remain there; but the child grew pale, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Mamma! what has become of mamma?" he murmured. Mériadec took good care not to tell him the truth.

"She is looking for you, no doubt," he replied. "I'll wager you did not stay at the place where she left you."

"That's true—I went round the large rooms where the bells are. I even lost myself there, and I had a great deal of difficulty in finding the door by which I went in."

"Well, your mamma, not seeing you, thought you had gone down, and she has done the same. We shall find her at the bottom—at the door."

"Well then, take me quickly to where you think she is," said the child, who had already recovered his courage. Mériadec wanted no more. He concluded that the murderer must be hiding in some corner in the towers, or in the galleries which surround their bases, and which communicate by lofty stairs with other passages above the roof of the nave. And this was the moment to give chase to him, at the risk of

the life of the orphan whom the generous baron had just taken under his protection. The best course was to save the child first and take him away, warning Rose Verdière to lock the gate and barricade herself in her room, so as to be safe from attack. The police would surely receive orders to search the topmost parts of Notre-Dame, and it was their business to discover the murderer whom Mériadec hoped soon to capture by a less prompt though surer method.

He hastily descended the stairs with the child, who had no mistrust for him, and engaged in conversation with Rose, in order briefly to explain the situation, which she readily understood.

Five minutes afterwards he arrived in the nave and hurried out of the cathedral. The child saw that his mother was not there, and began to cry again.

"Don't be alarmed, my young friend," said Mériadec affectionately; "I am going to take you to your mother. Where does she live?"

"At an hotel. We arrived in Paris last night."

"What is the name of the hotel?"

"I did not notice. I was asleep when we arrived, and I did not awake till mid-day. We came out at once."

"But you would recognise it again if I took you there?"

"I think so."

"Well, we will look for it together. You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"I am not afraid of any one."

"Then, you will not mind coming to rest at my house until I can start with you to look for the hotel!"

"I am willing—only I am so tired that I can't walk—and I am hungry."

"We will take a cab, and I have something to satisfy your appetite with at home," said Mériadec. "If we don't succeed in finding the hotel, we must use some other means. What is your name, my child?"

"Sacha."

"Is that your family name?"

"I have no other. In French that is Alexander."

"And what is your mother's name?"

"Xenia. She is a countess."

"Xenia! that is her Christian name; but your father's——?"

"My father's name is Paul Constantinowitch."

"More Christian names," thought Mériadec. "This poor little fellow evidently does not know much about it; it is no use insisting."

He hailed a cab, got into it with Sacha, and told the driver to take him to the Rue Cassette.

He had thought at first of taking the child before the commissary, but what would they do with the poor lost thing? They would have told him brutally of his mother's death; he would have been temporarily lodged in the Dépôt at the Préfecture, in company with young vagabonds and precocious thieves. This was exactly what Mériadec did not want, and there would always be time to relate this strange story to the magistrate, who would not fail to summon him shortly.

And Mériadec would not have thought of allowing this opportunity of protecting a feeble creature to escape. He had already resolved to

conduct the inquiry himself, to discover the murderer, to avenge the dead, and to restore to the orphan a fortune of which a wicked father probably wished to despoil him.

The child fell asleep on his shoulder. He slept so soundly that on arriving in the Rue Cassette Mériadec was obliged to carry him in his arms to his bedroom, and he carried him there without awaking him.

"At last!" he murmured, as he mounted the stairs, "I am about to have an object in life. I have a child to love. I only want now a wife to love me."

II.

An investigating magistrate is always a great personage, for it is he who plays the principal part in criminal cases. He holds the fate of prisoners in his hands and is absolutely independent.

But when this official has considerable personal weight, it adds largely to his importance, and his hierarchical superiors recognise his authority to the full.

This was the case with Monsieur Hugues de Malverne, the scion of an ancient family of lawyers and husband of a charming woman whose drawing-room was one of the most frequented in Paris. Holding a good position in the best society, this model magistrate had all the qualities necessary for the fulfilment of the delicate functions entrusted to him—absolute impartiality, immovable *sang froid*, and remarkable sagacity.

For this reason he was usually chosen to conduct difficult and delicate cases, such as that of the Notre-Dame towers.

He had been at once struck with it, and the day after the crime, at twelve o'clock, he was already in his room at the Palais, prepared to examine the prisoner and to hear the evidence of the witnesses who had been summoned during the morning.

Whilst awaiting their appearance, he engaged in conversation with the commissary of police, who had just given him an account of the facts, and he did not appear to be very satisfied with them.

"It is my opinion," said he, coldly, "that you should not have taken this course. It is possible that you have laid hands on the guilty party, but it is also possible that you have made a mistake in arresting this man. There is no proof against him; there is no proof even that a crime has been committed; and we have perhaps to deal only with a suicide. You should have begun with searching the towers and corners of Notre-Dame; you would have made certain that no one was hiding there, for, after all, others besides the accused may have been up there."

"A search was made, sir," replied the commissary; "I directed it myself, after having locked up the man, who refused to give his name."

"That was too late. Any one else would have had time to make his escape."

"Pardon me, sir, I left some men at the foot of the stairs, and I can positively state that no one had left the building before my arrival. The keeper's daughter will give evidence as to this. I made a minute

examination of the whole of the upper part of the cathedral—the towers, galleries, roofs—and found nothing.”

“And on the platform from which this woman fell, were there no traces of a struggle?”

“None. Besides the thing was done by surprise. According to the evidence of this artist, who saw it all from a distance, the woman, who was leaning over the balustrade, was seized by the legs, lifted up, and hurled into space before she had time to defend herself. The only suspicious thing I discovered was an open door—a little door situated on the narrow gallery which runs round the roof of the nave. It appears that this door is always kept shut, but there is no explanation as to how a man coming from the towers could have arrived there. He would have had an abyss to cross.”

“Well, but allowing that he did so, where would this passage have led him?”

“To an inner staircase which runs beneath the roof of the cathedral, and which opens on the pavement behind the choir.”

“Then, some one could have escaped in that direction?”

“It is most improbable.”

“It suffices that it is *possible* for me to doubt your prisoner's guilt. And, upon the whole, up to the present, there is nothing against him beyond suspicion.”

“Very grave suspicion, sir. If only for the fact that he refused to give his name——”

“To give it to *you*. He will tell it to me, perhaps. And he may have reasons for being unwilling to open his mouth except before a magistrate.”

“He gave it to be understood that he was with his mistress, who is a married woman. One could understand his refusing to give her name, but he might have given his own without compromising her.”

“Possibly he is so intimate with the husband that by doing so he might have drawn suspicion on her. He is certainly not so simple as to think that justice will not succeed in discovering his identity—and he will inform me, because he will hope that, if his innocence is established, I shall keep this matter secret. By the description you have given me of him he must be a person belonging to the upper classes.”

“I think so. But he took a singular precaution before leaving home yesterday. He was searched when he entered the Dépôt—which is according to the rules—and neither pocket-book, nor visiting-cards, nor papers of any sort were found on him—nothing but about twenty louis in his waistcoat pocket. One would say that he had foreseen that he would be arrested during the day, and that he had taken measures to preserve his incognito.”

“Yes, that is certainly odd—but not conclusive. And the same was the case with the woman?”

“Valuable jewels were found on her, but not a sou, and not a scrap of writing. She is well dressed, she wears very fine linen, and on the case of her watch is an initial surmounted by a countess's coronet. Her hands are white and her feet are very small. Her face is unrecognisable.”

“No matter, you will have her placed in the Morgue.”

"She has been there since this morning. They say there is a crowd there already, but I do not think she will be recognised. She is too much disfigured. I think there is no necessity for a post-mortem examination."

"Certainly not. There is no question here as to what was the cause of death. Of what age does she appear to be?"

"Thirty—perhaps a trifle more."

"And the prisoner?"

"Thirty-four or five."

"The chances are that he is not her husband."

"He is her lover; everything goes to prove it."

"But there must be a husband, and this husband will notice his wife's disappearance. It is not impossible for him to come to the Morgue, for he must read the papers, and he will see in them an account of the affair."

"Yes, if he is in Paris. But I should not be surprised if the woman were a foreigner. Her dress is rich, but it has not the Parisian style, and the initial engraved upon the watch is an X."

"Just so; and the only French name I can think of beginning with X is Xavier, and Xavier is a man's name. Have you obtained any information as to the witnesses whom I have had summoned?"

"Yes, sir. One is a house-surgeon at the hospital, very hard-working and clever, much esteemed by his superiors and beloved by his comrades; the other is an original character, a titled Breton, who came to live in Paris a few years ago. He leads a very steady life, and has an excellent character in the neighbourhood."

"Those two only saw the couple crossing the precincts. But the third—the one who professes to have seen the crime committed——"

"Is an artist out of work—a poor wretch who lives in a garret on the fifth floor of an old house in the Rue de la Huchette. But it appears he is well-conducted, and I have ascertained that the police know nothing against him."

"That is not enough for me to take his word, and, as a matter of fact, the whole charge rests on his evidence; for if he had not told this story—which perhaps he has imagined—every one would have thought that it was a case of suicide."

"That is true, sir; but he appears to be honest; and besides, what interest could he have in romancing?"

"The desire to have himself talked about; and then, he may have been mistaken—from the distance at which he was placed. At any rate, I will examine him, and I shall easily see whether there is any faith to be put in his statement. I will hear the accused first, and I believe that after I have heard what he says, I shall know the rights and wrongs of the case. You have nothing further to tell me?"

"Nothing, sir; unless it is that the keeper of the towers performs his duties very badly. If he had not been drunk, he would not have forgotten to close the gate, and we should have known who went in and who out. If the case falls to the ground, it will be Verdière's fault."

"You would do well to report his negligence, and request his dis-

charge. I will examine his daughter as well, after the other witnesses. And now, sir, I will not detain you longer. I have ordered the accused to be brought from the Dépôt. Be good enough, as you pass, to tell the guard who is stationed at my room door to have the man brought in immediately he arrives—and brought in alone. The soldier who has him in charge will remain in the corridor.”

The commissary bowed and left the room, leaving the magistrate alone with his clerk, who was yawning and sharpening his pens in a corner.

This clerk was an old fellow, grown grey in the service, who mechanically performed his modest functions, and who bestowed but little heed on the questions and answers which he took down. However, Monsieur de Malverne thought it necessary to say to him :

“You will write only when I make a sign to you. It is not impossible that the accused should clear himself immediately, and in that case there will be no further proceedings. There would be nothing beyond an interview, of which it would be needless to take particulars.”

“Very good, sir,” answered the clerk, with perfect indifference.

The reason why Monsieur de Malverne gave this order was because he was inclined to believe in the innocence of the prisoner. He imagined that this man would now give his name as well as further explanations, and that the charge, which had been badly built up, would fall to the ground. In this case, of what use would it be to commit to writing answers which might compromise a married woman? It would be sufficient to satisfy himself that this woman was still alive, and that, as a natural consequence, her lover had no other crime on his conscience than that of having deceived her husband. It would not even be necessary to establish an alibi, in order to set at liberty a gallant man who had been the victim of an error.

If, on the contrary, the accused persisted in refusing any explanation, then would be the time to enter upon a formal inquiry. The struggle would begin, and the magistrate had no doubt that he should come off best.

In any case, he put on his magisterial air, a certain air which he always hastened to throw off on leaving the Palais, and which he never wore in his drawing-room. He was under arms when the door opened. A gentleman entered alone, and walked slowly towards the table behind which sat Monsieur de Malverne, who cried, “What, you, my old Jacques! What has put it into your head to come and look me up at the Palais, just when I am going to examine a prisoner? Ah, I have it! you have come to apologise for not having dined with us yesterday. We waited till eight for you, my wife was furious with you, and I don’t believe she has forgiven you yet.”

The gentleman whom the magistrate had just called familiarly by his Christian name started with surprise on recognising Monsieur de Malverne, and could only stammer, “What! is it you who——”

“Yes, of course, it is I; did you expect to find my wife in my room?” asked the magistrate, laughing in his friend’s face.

And as the latter remained plunged in a state of stupefaction which took away all power of speech, he added, “Come! explain yourself. You did not come here without a motive, and I can see from your face

that it is something serious. I am ready to listen to you, although I am very busy just now—I am astonished even that they let you in; but you were quite right to pass the guard; friendship comes before even criminal business. Speak, my dear fellow. What can I do for you?"

And as his friend still kept silence,

"I see, you thought to find me alone; that's soon remedied. Leave us, Pilois," said Monsieur de Malverne, addressing his clerk. "I will call you when I want you. Do not go far." The old man hastily left the room, and the magistrate continued, "Now we are alone. You can speak to me confidentially without hindrance. And, first of all, why this concerned look? What has happened?"

"It is impossible that you should not know," replied Jacques, with an effort.

"And how the deuce should I know? I pitched into you last night when you did not appear. Odette said that you must have broken your leg at least, for, as a rule, your punctuality is exemplary. We expected to receive an excuse this morning, and none came; but I had forgotten all about that by this time, as I have got an unexpected case on my hands. I had to breakfast in haste and rush off to the Palais. It is a question of a very curious affair, which may become a serious one. I am awaiting a gentleman accused of a murder. I have just sent for him from the Dépôt. The door opens, and I thought he was going to appear, but—not a bit of it—it is you who enter. You must allow that I had reason to be astonished—and to ask you the answer to this riddle."

"The man whom you are awaiting—the man who was arrested yesterday—is myself."

Monsieur de Malverne's face changed, and looking fixedly at his friend, he said:

"Are you joking, or are you mad?"

"Neither. If you do not believe me, call the guard who came to fetch me from the Dépôt, and who brought me here in handcuffs."

"Then, you passed the night in prison? How is it that it did not strike you to refer to me?"

"It did strike me, but I rejected the idea. I had no doubt about being released to-day, after the examination before a magistrate, and I preferred to keep this adventure a secret from you. I did not imagine that the magistrate would be yourself."

"Fortunately so, for you can confide everything to me; me, your old comrade and best friend, whilst you would not have cared to tell the whole truth to one of my colleagues. I may say I am glad you did not tell it to the commissary. In cases like yours, one cannot be too reserved, since a woman's honour is at stake——"

"You know the facts, then?"

"Not in detail; the commissary has just made me his report; I know that you refused to answer his questions, and even to tell him your name. I had no difficulty in guessing why, even before knowing that you were in the case. Now I know all. The person who was with you is married, and you were anxious to save her good name. I should have acted like you, under the same conditions. But your

generosity might have cost you dear. To allow one's self to be accused of murder rather than compromise a woman, is heroic. Then, it is a serious intimacy?"

"Too serious, as you see."

"Well, I had no idea of it. I thought you were satisfied with temporary love affairs, as when we were young. I was reading for the bar and you had just left the military academy to join the garrison of Paris. We have both changed. I am a married man, and you are making dupes of married men. Every one to his taste. I love my wife, and it would not suit me at all to have to disguise myself to visit a mistress. Adultery is punishable under the penal code, my dear fellow; it is a case of risking two years in prison, and you have just run a still greater risk—death, or penal servitude. True, you were unlucky. To climb up to the summit of Notre-Dame in order to make love there, and to arrive just at the moment when an unfortunate woman is thrown over, is the height of bad luck."

"Then you do not accuse me of having murdered her?"

"Certainly not. I know you too well to suppose you guilty of any crime. There is no question now of examining you, and I am glad I sent my clerk away. We can talk together like two old friends. But sit down. I can't offer you a cigar, because it is against the practice to smoke here. I don't quite see how it could affect the dignity of the magistrature, but, at any rate, such is the case."

Monsieur de Malverne's tone was well calculated to reassure his friend Jacques, and yet Jacques remained anxious and preoccupied. He evidently saw that the magistrate, now so favourably disposed towards him, would not confine himself to such friendly conversation, and he was prepared to have some very embarrassing questions to answer.

"Well," continued Monsieur de Malverne, "you must tell me all about this absurd affair before I let you go home. You won't be sorry to get there after a night passed at the Dépôt."

"Say rather twenty hours, which appeared to me terribly long."

"Well, at any rate, your name does not figure on the list of prisoners, and no one will ever know that Jacques de Saint-Briac, retired cavalry captain, slept at the Dépôt of the Préfecture, like a common street brawler."

"Then you won't tell the commissary of police who arrested me what my name is?"

"Certainly not. He is under my orders, and I owe him no explanation. Besides, I alone am responsible for the decisions at which I arrive. I have the right to throw the depositions in the fire, and to say to you, 'Go in peace.' I have even the right to invite you to dinner to-night."

"I should not come," said Jacques de Saint-Briac, quickly.

"Why not? Odette will be charmed to hear from your own mouth the account of your misfortunes, if you are not otherwise engaged. But tell me how the people who pointed you out to the police could have mistaken you for some one else, for there is a guilty party—there is no doubt about that."

"Upon my honour, I cannot understand. I was arrested on the stairs; I was taken to the hospital, and confronted with the corpse of

a disfigured woman whom I knew nothing about. I was told then that I was charged with having thrown her from the top of the tower. What could I say? I had not seen her fall, and I did not want to acknowledge I had gone up."

"Naturally. But you must confess that it was a curious idea to take your companion on to the top of the towers of Notre-Dame."

"It was her wish. We had arranged to meet in the precincts."

"Yes, you choose for meeting-places those neighbourhoods where you run no risk of meeting people of your own class—for she belonged to the upper classes, did she not?"

"To the best society; and she has so many precautions to take that she is always fearful of being recognised when we are out together."

"Have you only got so far as going for walks together?"

"That is all. She has never come to my place, and she is rarely at liberty. Yesterday we were to have walked from Notre-Dame to the Jardin des Plantes, along the deserted quays. Then she thought that we should be still more alone on the towers. At that moment no one was to be seen there."

"The deuce! your mistress is fanciful. And when you see her again, I should advise you to tell her of the terrible danger you run through her fault. If you had fallen to the lot of another magistrate, I don't know how you would have fared. Continue your story. You went up the stairs, and did not encounter the keeper?"

"We only saw a girl, who said nothing to us. There was certainly a gate, but it was open. We arrived without further incident on the gallery above the rose-window which is over the porch."

"And you halted there? She was tired?"

"That was not the reason. On looking up I saw two heads peering over the balustrade on the top of the tower."

"A man and a woman?"

"I think so; but I could not swear. The two heads only appeared and disappeared."

"They saw you, and the man had a reason for concealing himself."

"Probably. I have thought since that the murderer was he; but the only thought in my mind at that time was the impossibility of going any higher without finding ourselves face to face with them."

"You must, both of you, have been confoundedly stupid not to have foreseen this *contretemps*. Twenty people go up the towers of Notre-Dame every day—especially when it is fine—and yesterday the weather was superb. Well, then, you both remained on the gallery? or rather, you alone remained, for the lady went off by herself? Why did you not come down at the same time?"

"My dear Hugues, there was a fatality all through this unfortunate business. My friend had bought, on leaving home, one of those blue veils which Englishwomen are so fond of, and which are as thick as masks. Her husband would not have recognised her in the street with this veil drawn down over her face. It was her principal security. She raised it when on the gallery; the cord was badly put on, and the wind, which was very strong, carried it away."

"The misfortunes of a happy lover!" said Monsieur de Malverne, smiling.

"The loss was irreparable. How could we continue our walk undisguised? Our last resource was to take a cab, but it would be necessary to find one, and they are rare in the Cité. With one accord we decided to separate immediately. She descended hastily, and a quarter of an hour afterwards I did the same. I was unlucky to have waited so long, for I was collared on the stairs. You know the rest."

"Perfectly; and now I can guess what happened. During the time they were taking you to the Dépôt the wretch who did the deed hid himself away in some corner. The fools who arrested you did not think of searching the topmost parts of the cathedral, and he escaped by a staircase which opens out behind the choir. The person who accompanied you is unharmed, and I can very well take upon myself to set you at liberty, especially as there is no reason to prevent you now from telling me who she is."

"Telling you who she is? But you know well that I cannot. I went to prison sooner than give her name."

"To the commissary of police, and you were quite right. The name would have appeared in his report of the case. But I am quite different. The inquiry is closed, or, to be more exact, it has never been opened. It is not the magistrate who is asking you, it is the friend."

"You have your doubts still?"

"No, I believe you are incapable of telling a lie. But, as a matter of fact, in giving the order for your release I am taking a great responsibility on myself, and if I ask for this name it is only to clear my conscience. Pray understand that the only question is to satisfy myself that the woman you are accused of having murdered is alive."

"And how would you satisfy yourself, if you please? By calling her and examining her yourself? That would be sufficient to ruin her, and I would rather be condemned to death than expose her to appear in this room."

"I should not be forced to proceed thus. If you would only say to me, 'It was Madame So-and-so, living in such-and-such a street, at a certain number,' I should obtain my information discreetly, and I should soon know whether she was in the land of the living."

"You would be no further advanced, my dear Hugues, for supposing I were guilty, and, in order to clear myself, I were to name a woman who had never been my mistress, you would proceed no further."

"That would be an act of which I believe you to be totally incapable. And, really, I cannot see what you have to fear in telling me the truth. Do you doubt my discretion, or do you mistrust my intentions?"

"Not the least in the world. But you admitted yourself that, in the position in which I am placed, the most absolute silence is the imperative duty of a gallant man."

"Yes, if I knew this woman, for then I might meet her in society, and if she knew that I was the confidant of your amours, she would be very much embarrassed if she saw me; but——"

"Well," answered the captain, after hesitating, "supposing it were so; suppose even, if you like, that you were on familiar terms with her husband——"

"The fact is that I should find myself in an embarrassing position," said the magistrate, laughing. "But that is only a simple hypothesis, in which I do not believe. You and I frequent the same drawing-rooms, and amongst the women whom we habitually see I can suspect none. Confess, then, that this conquest of yours is outside our ordinary circle of acquaintance. You go to a quantity of houses where I have not the *entrée*, because I remained a magistrate under the Republic—and in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, like everywhere else, there are deluded husbands."

Saint-Briac was silent, and his contracted face betrayed violent emotion.

"Do you know," continued De Malverne, "that if I wished, it only rests with me to discover your secret? As a magistrate, I have the police at my orders; and as you will probably not break off at this point with your mistress, I have only got to order detectives to watch you."

"You will not do that, I hope!" said Saint-Briac eagerly, and growing visibly paler.

"No, my dear fellow, I simply wished to prove to you that there is some merit in my taking your word for it. And I confess that you have almost wounded my feelings in refusing to tell me this name which I wished to know. But God forbid that I should suspect you of an abominable crime, you whom I see every day, and love as a brother. I will order your release—it is an affair of a quarter of an hour. Go home, and come and dine to-night. My wife will give you a scolding, and you won't have disappointed her."

"What! you will tell Madame de Malverne this wretched tale?"

"I hide nothing from her, and she hides nothing from me. It is the best way of getting on together, and we get on admirably."

"You might at least consider me. I have played such a ridiculous part."

"I do not think so. On the contrary, you have conducted yourself like a faithful knight—you have carried your devotion to the verge of heroism, and I guarantee that, instead of chaffing, Odette will admire you; she has a weakness for that kind of thing. But you must be longing for the Avenue d'Antin. I will give you your discharge," said the magistrate, seating himself at his desk in order to fill up a printed form.

Jacques de Saint-Briac began to breathe more freely, but he had not quite recovered from the terrible emotions through which he had just passed.

"That is done," continued Monsieur de Malverne. "You will give this paper to the director of the Dépôt, and he will release you immediately. I would willingly have spared you this tiresome journey, but it is the rule, and this time they will not handcuff you to cross the court of the Sainte-Chapelle. I will tell the guard who is waiting to reconduct you."

Having said this he rang his bell. A tipstaff entered, he gave him some orders to communicate to the soldier, and inquired if the wit-

nesses had arrived. None of them had appeared yet, for the excellent reason that they had only been summoned for three o'clock. "It is my fault," said the magistrate, "I thought the examination of the accused would be a very long one, and I have got through it all in twenty minutes. So I have time to accompany you to the Dépôt. It is better that I should explain it to the director myself. I will come back afterwards and examine the witnesses who have been summoned to attend."

"What is the use of examining them, since you are setting me at liberty?" asked Saint-Briac.

"What use! Why, I am not dropping the case. You are innocent, that is clear as day, but some one is guilty, and I intend to find him. The murderer is the man who went up with the unfortunate woman whom they showed you at the hospital. It is necessary that I should hear the evidence of those who accused you at first. But there will be no question of you. Now, follow me, my dear friend—or rather, no—you shall take my arm, so that every one can see that you are no longer a prisoner."

Jacques obeyed. The two friends traversed arm-in-arm the long corridors and the court-yard, to the infinite astonishment of the guard, who had never seen a magistrate treat a prisoner at the Dépôt in that way. The astonishment of the jailers was not less, but the explanation was short between the magistrate and the director, who escorted them to the door after the usual formalities had been gone through.

"At last I am a free man again, thanks to you," said Saint-Briac, when they got outside. "I shall never forget what you have done for me."

"I did my duty, and your name will not figure on the registers of the Dépôt. You will leave nothing there but your description."

"I began to be afraid lest you should have compromised yourself to save the honour of my name."

"Be easy. I shall see the president and the attorney-general to-day. I shall not be able to conceal from them that you are Jacques de Saint-Briac, ex-captain in the Ninth Cuirassiers, and my best friend. But I am certain they will approve of my having acted as I have done."

"It is bad enough that they should know who I am," murmured Saint-Briac.

"Upon my word, my dear fellow, you are hard to please. You ought to be charmed to get off so cheaply, for it might have cost you dear—and your mistress too."

"I know it, my friend, and I am not complaining, I assure you," answered Saint-Briac sadly. "Pardon me for what I have just said, and believe me that I put myself in your hands. Besides, I have no need to alarm myself. The two magistrates whom you are about to take into your confidence are men of honour."

"And they have something else to do than to try and discover the name of the lady fair for the sake of whose beautiful eyes you got yourself into this scrape. You will be heard of no more in the inquiry. Go in peace, and come to dinner this evening at seven."

"Don't ask me to do that, I beg you. I am still suffering too much from emotion. I need a few days to recover myself."

"Nonsense! I know you too well to believe that you are as nervous as a woman; and I begin to wonder what reason you can have for not wishing to dine with my wife. Upon my word, one might think you were afraid of the reception she would give you."

"What an idea!" stammered Saint-Briac. "I am only afraid of being a doleful guest. But I will come, as you insist."

"That's right. Now that I have your promise I shall leave you and go back to my room to examine the witnesses who are coming—for I am not going to drop the affair—and we shall try and find the gentleman who was on the top of the tower with a woman whilst you were on the gallery flirting with your fair one. His disappearance proves a crime; if this unhappy woman had committed suicide, the villain would not have escaped by the roof."

"You will have a difficulty in finding him. No one saw him near enough to recognise him."

"That is true. But the finger of God is in it. The woman is being exhibited at the Morgue. He will come there and be arrested, perhaps. It only needs an exclamation, an expression of the face, to be noticed by one of the detectives I have placed there. Besides, we shall make inquiries. A woman doesn't disappear without some one noticing it—especially a rich woman, and this one was covered with jewels. If she is a foreigner, she must have been staying at an hotel; we shall get to know which. At any rate, I will keep you informed. This evening, then, my dear friend," concluded Monsieur de Malverne, giving his friend's hand a hearty shake.

Jacques de Saint-Briac followed him with his eyes an instant, and walked slowly towards the great door which opens on to the Boulevard du Palais, the door by which he would have emerged in a prison van on his way to Mazas prison if he had been examined by another magistrate.

He ought to have been radiant, but he did not appear sufficiently to appreciate his good fortune. His face had not relaxed, and on his forehead, which remained careworn, might have been read more uneasiness than joy.

One would have said that he dreaded the result of this affair which had terminated so fortunately.

He passed, with head bent, under the archway where were stationed the sentries, who paid no attention to him, and, once beyond the precincts of the Palais, he stopped to wait for an empty cab.

He was in a hurry to return home, and the Avenue d'Antin was distant. It would have taken him some time to go there on foot.

Whilst he was looking out for a cab, he did not notice a man who had come and stationed himself on the pavement at two paces from him, and who was attentively examining him.

This man held a poorly-clad child by the hand. Saint-Briac turned round and recognised him instantly.

"Ah! it is you, sir," said he. "Why do you look at me thus? Are you astonished to see me at liberty? I can quite believe it; for if I have been released, it was not your fault. It was you who caused me to be arrested."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied Mériadec. "I involuntarily contributed to your arrest, but I never thought you were guilty. I have been summoned by the magistrate, and I came to give evidence in your favour."

"It is quite unnecessary," said Saint-Briac. "He knows that I am innocent, and he has just set me at liberty."

"I congratulate you with all my heart, and I see now that you were the victim of a mistake." And addressing the child who was standing at his side, he said :

"Do you know the gentleman, Sacha ?"

"No," said Sacha. "This is the first time I have seen him."

"I was certain of it," murmured Mériadec.

"Would you be good enough to explain to me, sir, what this species of identification means ?" said Saint-Briac drily.

"It proves to me that a mistake was made in arresting you. I was sure of it beforehand. If there was the least doubt remaining in my mind, this child's reply would have dispelled it. He would not have failed to recognise you."

"I am really very much obliged to him," said the captain ironically.

"Sir," replied Mériadec, "you are wrong to take ill-naturedly what I say to you. I can understand that you should have retained an unpleasant impression of me. Possibly you thought that I was your accuser. But I repeat that I came here to defend you."

"I have no need of defence, since I am at liberty, and you will be good enough to spare me any further conversation."

Having spoken thus, the retired captain of Cuirassiers bowed distantly to Mériadec and passed on.

The worthy Mériadec remained very much perplexed, and with good reason.

It was not without a struggle that he had decided to bring Sacha before the magistrate, who did not know of the child's existence. He would have preferred to keep to himself the discovery which he had made in the south tower, and such had been his intention at first ; but he had had time for reflection, and during the night wiser counsels had prevailed.

He had said to himself that a man's life hung in the balance, and that he had no right to hide his light under a bushel, since it would be sufficient to place this child in the presence of the prisoner, in order to prove that this prisoner was not the murderer of the woman. Finally, after long hesitation, he had resolved to present himself before the magistrate, with Sacha, some time before the hour indicated in the summons he had received in the course of the morning.

And, behold ! on arriving at the Palais, he met the man who had been arrested the day before, and was at liberty to-day ! He had accosted this man, who adopted a high tone towards him, refused his assistance, and even disdained to listen to him.

This incident decidedly modified the situation. Since there was no longer a question of saving an innocent man, Mériadec regained his liberty of action, and nothing demanded that he should inform justice of anything about which he was not questioned.

Thus, by degrees, he returned to his first determination, which was

to act alone, aided by Sacha, and to discover the murderer without any intervention on the part of the police. He had already become strongly attached to this child, and it would have cost him much to part from him.

He had told him nothing of all this. Sacha was ignorant as yet of his mother's tragic death, and on leaving the house in the Rue Cassette, where he had passed the night, he did not know that his protector was taking him to the Palais. He believed that he was going in search of the hotel where his parents had stayed on arriving in Paris.

There was no need, then, for Mériadec to explain to him that he had changed his mind, and no reason against substituting for the visit to the magistrate a long walk through the town, in the districts where rich foreigners for the most part stay.

On the other hand, Mériadec did not forget that the magistrate was awaiting him, and that to absent himself was to expose himself to annoyances of which the chief one would be that the police would be after him, if this magistrate bethought himself to send a detective to fetch the recalcitrant witness. But he was not to appear until three o'clock, and the Palais clock was striking two. He had time to spare, and could easily take Sacha back to the Rue Cassette. The question was to learn whether Sacha would accept this change in the programme, and Mériadec was doubtful of it, for he already knew the young Muscovite's character, and that he was the most self-willed and stubborn child imaginable.

On awaking, after having slept fifteen hours at a stretch, he had begun to call out Russian names, doubtless the names of his father's servants; then, on seeing Mériadec's housekeeper appear, he had flung himself into a violent passion, and had insulted her in excellent French.

He had only quieted down on the appearance of Mériadec, who had succeeded in appeasing him with kind words, and when there was a question of putting on again the shabby clothes which he had worn the day before, he had burst into tears. In order to persuade him to dress, Mériadec had had to promise to buy him some new ones the same day.

At breakfast he had eaten like an ogre, saying all the time that the food and lodging were bad, to the great amusement of Mériadec, who was noting the effects of an aristocratic Russian education. This urchin must have been brought up to beat peasants and to satisfy all his caprices; Mériadec concluded from this that his parents were powerful boyars.

However, he did not seem to regret them much, and Mériadec had been able to gather no information from him during the meal, to his great vexation and surprise, for the child was by no means lacking in intelligence. On leaving the table Sacha had proposed to go out to buy his clothes. Mériadec had purposed taking him to the *Belle Jardinière* after the visit to the magistrate, and at the moment when he was deliberating on the Boulevard du Palais the child took good care to remind him of his promise.

"Well," he asked, "shall we soon come to the shop where they sell clothes?"

"How well you talk French!" he said, as they walked towards the Quai de l'Horloge. "You must have had a good master."

"I!" cried Sacha. "I could never stand masters. They had one for me from Paris. I teased him so much that he would not stay. Papa taught me French. Mamma knows it too; they never talk Russian together."

"Yes; I know that it is the custom in your country among well-educated people. What town did you live in?"

"We lived in the country. But I have been to Moscow twice."

"In what province was your home?"

"In the province of Tambow."

This was the first definite information that Sacha had given, and might prove useful. Mériadec tried to obtain more.

"What was the name of your château?" he asked.

"I don't know what a château is. The place we lived at is called Vérine. Our house is two versts from the village, which belongs to mamma."

"According to that," thought Mériadec, "I have only to write to Russia in order to know the name of the poor woman whose body lies in the Morgue. And," he continued aloud, "your mother, you told me, is called the Countess Xenia?"

"Yes," replied the child proudly, "and she is as noble as the emperor."

"As well as your father?"

"More so than my father. She is descended from Rurik: he is not."

"Then, you received a good deal of society at Vérine? All the nobility of the neighbourhood came to your house, I suppose?"

"No; we received no one. Papa would not."

Mériadec began to picture to himself the situation of this curiously assorted family: a great Russian lady, married to a man of a class inferior to her own, and tabooed by her neighbours because of this *mésalliance*. This fitted in well with the tragic outcome of this ill-assorted match.

"And you spent the whole year there?" he asked.

"Mamma, yes. But papa was often abroad. He had been away six months when we left Vérine to come to Paris."

"What! he did not come with you?"

"No; he was waiting for us at the station."

"And he took you to an hotel?"

"I don't know whether it was an hotel. We slept in a large house where there were only ourselves. We went there in a carriage—in papa's carriage."

Mériadec was much chagrined at this fresh information. It was useless now to inquire at the hotels in the neighbourhood of the Northern and Eastern stations. This house might be in he knew not what part of Paris. And one could imagine that the villainous husband had taken his precautions in advance, so that it would be impossible to find a trace of the passage of the woman whom he had determined to kill, and of the child whom he had determined to lose.

"Shall we soon be at this shop?" asked Sacha.

"You can see it from here," said Mériadec.

They were on the Pont Neuf; two minutes after they entered the *Belle Jardinière*, and the child opened his eyes as he saw the interminable galleries of that immense ready-made clothing establishment.

It was no small matter to dress him to his taste. He wanted a Russian costume: the silk cafetan, the velvet breeches, the fur cap, the little boots up to the knee, and there was nothing of the kind to be found there. He had to be contented with a very elegant outfit, and the promise, which he exacted, to make as soon as possible a Russian costume to his measure.

This metamorphosis took time, and on leaving the shop, Mériadec saw by his watch that it was a quarter to three. He did not want to keep the magistrate waiting, so he set off towards the Palais again, without knowing what he should do with Sacha whilst he himself was being examined.

He had almost decided to place the child in the care of the officer who guarded the door of the magistrate's room, when, on arriving at the spot where he had met Monsieur de Saint-Briac, he found himself face to face with the man in the red cap.

"Ah! you!" cried the artist. "Come to give evidence? Well, you can spare yourself the trouble of going up three flights of stairs. Our magistrate has just been summoned by the president, and the hearing is postponed until to-morrow."

"So much the better," said Mériadec, who was delighted to be master of his own movements again.

"Let us go to the Morgue, shall we?"

And as Mériadec made a negative sign, pointing to Sacha:

"What difference does that make?" continued Fabreguette.

"Bring the kid. It will amuse him. You have a son, then? How odd! I didn't fancy you married."

"I'm not," replied Mériadec shortly, "and this child is not mine."

"Ah! good! I was just thinking he is not a bit like you. Well, will you come to the Morgue? The woman has been lying there since this morning, and there must be heaps of people there. For my part, I should like to see her again, for I hardly had time to look at her yesterday. And, besides, I am curious to know whether she will be recognised. I propose passing the morning in the Place outside."

The carless Bohemian's proposal had not much attraction for Mériadec. He had a repugnance for showing Sacha his mother's corpse. And yet he said to himself that this proof would be decisive. He was not yet absolutely certain that Sacha was the son of the woman who had been picked up from the pavement of Notre-Dame, and he would only possess this proof if Sacha recognised the body. But what an ordeal for this unfortunate child to go through! How would he bear it? and what would he say on seeing the dead woman's mutilated face? Would he cry out aloud, "It is my mother!" The detectives who were in the room would not fail to interfere, and Mériadec's plans would end in smoke, for the law would not allow him to keep Sacha.

"Come along," insisted Fabreguette; "I'll wager that your friend the house-surgeon has already been to the 'corpse room.' He is a

witness, and we are witnesses—the visit to the Morgue is obligatory for us.”

“What is the Morgue?” gravely asked Sacha, who had been attentively listening to the artist’s chatter.

“What! you don’t know? Where does the brat come from? Have you just arrived from the country?”

“What is that to you?” replied the child. “And why do you talk to me like that? I won’t have you so familiar.”

“Pardon me, my lord,” said Fabreguette chaffingly. “I did not know that I was addressing the scion of a noble race.”

Sacha received this ironical excuse unmoved, and said: “You have not answered the question I asked you.”

“Well, well, prince. The Morgue is an hotel where the dead put up temporarily, before being carried to the cemetery.”

“And, I suppose, my dear child, that you have no wish to go and see them?” added Mériadec.

“Yes, yes. I have never seen but one. It was one of our peasants who had drunk too much brandy, and who had fallen under the wheels of his *kibitka*. I was not at all afraid. I shall not be afraid now. Let us go to the Morgue.”

“Kibitka!” repeated the artist. “Your highness is a Russian. I thought as much.”

These jests vexed Mériadec as much as Sacha’s haughty *sang-froid* surprised him, and he asked himself whether he had not better put an end to Fabreguette’s nonsense by yielding to the clearly expressed desire of the child, who seemed to him strong enough to bear the most violent emotions.

After all, it would be necessary, sooner or later, to inform him how his mother had died, and it was as well to break it to him suddenly.

“If she is really his mother,” thought the baron, “he will, I am sure, have the courage not to make a scene of his despair before the public in the Morgue, and after we have been there, I will tell him the truth. When he knows it he will help me to find the murderer.”

“Well?” asked Sacha, stamping his foot, “why are you waiting to take me to the Morgue? Is it far from here?”

“On the contrary, quite close.”

“Then, we shall have time to take a walk afterwards. Now that I am pretty well dressed, I will walk about the town as much as you like.”

Mériadec, who had made up his mind, walked towards the Morgue by the shortest way, having the child on his right and Fabreguette on his left.

They crossed the precincts, and as they entered the Rue du Cloître-Notre-Dame, Sacha stopped and said:

“Here is the little door by which we entered the tower yesterday. And there is the street by which we came,” he added, pointing out the Rue d’Arcole; “we got out of the carriage on the quay, and papa dismissed the driver.”

“Ah!” said Fabreguette, “I begin to understand.”

Mériadec would have preferred not to take him into his confidence, for he doubted his discretion; but he perceived too late that it would be exceedingly difficult to disguise the truth from the sagacious artist;

and to prevent him from starting on a flood of questions which he did not wish to answer before Sacha, he whispered in his ear :

"Not a word more, I beg you ; when we are alone, I will tell you all that has happened."

"Enough," whispered the artist of the Rue de la Huchette. The child was silent now, and it did not seem as if the remembrance evoked by the sight of the entrance to the tower had affected him. Evidently he did not yet suspect that his mother had been flung from the top of this tower which he had ascended with her. And Mériadec asked himself once more how the poor little fellow would bear the horrible surprise which awaited him at the Morgue.

They could see it already, that sinister building which casts such a gloom over the western part of the Cité. It is almost a monument. One approaches it by a broad flight of stone steps, and in order to enter it is necessary to squeeze one's self through one of the two openings at the ends of a wall, built there in order to spare too impressionable passers-by the sight of the lugubrious opening behind which the corpses are laid out on marble slabs.

There was a crowd at the door. It was known in this populous neighbourhood that the body of a woman who had fallen from the top of the tower had been exposed all the morning, and every one wished to see her.

There was a line of people and the police were regulating the traffic. The visitors entered by the passage on the right, and after having passed in close column before the partition, went out on the left.

And these visitors were not all workmen taking a holiday, or *grisettes* in search of sensation, for two or three cabs and even a private brougham were standing near, on the quay. "Let us take our places," said Fabreguette to Mériadec, who hesitated.

However, he followed his companion. He had not come thus far to go back at the last moment, and Sacha would not have submitted to be taken away without resistance. The three took their places behind a group of women in caps, who were talking over the occurrence. They soon found themselves jammed between these gossips and another group of workmen who had entered as they passed by, just because others were doing so.

They moved along quickly, for the police did not allow the spectators to stand before the opening, so that Mériadec, thrust forward by the crowd in the room, was not long in perceiving, at the end of the first row of black marble tables, the body of the stranger.

By an intentional disregard of the rules, they had left her clothes and even her jewels ; but her head, shattered by the terrible fall, was but a mass of blood-stained flesh.

The string of people of which they formed part skirted the right-hand wall, and those who had already passed the glass partition were leaving in the opposite direction, so that the two extremities of this line faced one another.

Suddenly Sacha snatched away his hand, gave vent to a scream, and would have rushed across the room if Mériadec had not prevented him by seizing his arm.

The child struggled to escape, and began to call out in Russian to some one whom Mériadec did not distinguish at first amongst the crowd which was moving along the other side, in the direction of the door.

"Let me go!" cried Sacha. "It is he!—It is my father!"

No one answered, but Mériadec believed that this cry was addressed to a tall gentleman whose back he only saw, and he was about to allow himself to be dragged along by the child, when one of the policemen barred the way, saying:

"What is the matter with the boy?"

"You see he is afraid," said Fabreguette, who had immediately realised the situation.

"Take him away, then," replied the policeman roughly. "It's against all sense to bring children here. Take him away, you and your friend who has hold of his arm."

Mériadec, too, had understood. He did not wait to be told twice to walk towards the door, without releasing Sacha, who was struggling frantically. Fabreguette followed their example, and the policeman thrust them all three outside.

Once there, Sacha looked around in every direction, and saw, twenty yards away, the gentleman whom he sought.

This gentleman was running at full speed towards the conveyances which were stationed on the quay. The baron, the artist, and the child ran after him; but before they had overtaken him they saw him jump into a brougham, whose coachman had come to meet him.

The door shut and the horse started off at full speed over the bridge which connects the Cité with the Ile Saint-Louis. Sacha, pale with rage, shook his fist at the vanishing carriage, and cried out to its master, who could not hear him:

"Paul Constantinowitch!—my curses on you!"

"He is superb in that part," muttered Fabreguette. "They don't manufacture children like that in Paris."

Mériadec, dumbfounded, knew not what to do.

"Take me to your home," said Sacha to him abruptly.

"Well said, my young lord," said the artist. "I will go with you to our friend the Baron Mériadec's."

The child did not reply, and began to walk straight on, without troubling himself whether he was going towards the Rue Cassette. His eyes blazed, and his face had suddenly changed its expression. He had become twelve years older in five minutes, and had assumed the air of a youth of twenty.

Chance had put him in the right direction, for he walked towards the left side of the river. Mériadec and Fabreguette followed him closely.

"It is his mother who is in the Morgue," said the artist, lowering his voice; "and the man who has just escaped is the murderer; am I not right?"

"You have guessed right," murmured Mériadec.

"Very well, we can't bring the woman to life again. Shall we join forces to have the man arrested?"

"Yes, on condition that my friend Daubrac shall form one."

"The three musketeers?"

"Not exactly; there were four of them. A D'Artagnan is wanting, unless——"

"You know one?"

"There is the gentleman who was arrested by mistake, and whom the magistrate has just released. If he would join us, all would be well."

"That's what I want. Let us go and deliberate at your house," concluded Fabreguette. "I have a plan; I will tell you it."

III.

MONSIEUR DE MALVERNE lived in a house belonging to himself, *situate*, as the legal term runs, in its own grounds. The court-yard opened, by a majestic entrance, on the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the garden extended as far as the Avenue Gabriel, from which it was separated by iron railings covered with ivy.

Official visitors entered by the court-yard; intimate friends preferred to pass through the garden.

Built during the last Empire by a wealthy foreigner who wished to live in Paris, and whom the events of the "year of terror" drove from it, this house seemed to have been constructed expressly for the young couple who had bought it very cheaply after the war and the Commune.

On marrying Mademoiselle Odette de Benserade, who brought him a dowry of six hundred thousand francs, Hugues de Malverne, already possessing large means of his own, had determined to live in a style becoming his new position, and he had been—as he always was—fortunate, for this worthy magistrate was born under a lucky star.

His wife was a charming woman, and never during the two and a half years that they had been married had a cloud obscured, even temporarily, the sky over the heads of this admirably-assorted couple.

Well born, well educated, surpassingly pretty and remarkably intelligent, Madame de Malverne was endowed with all the advantages that a husband could wish for, and the sole grief she had caused him was that she had not borne him a child.

She loved society, received a great deal at her house, and had known how to attract to and retain in her drawing-room amiable and agreeable men. Bores were mercilessly excluded from it, and only carefully-selected women were admitted.

But the only friend who was on an intimate footing was Jacques de Saint-Briac, Hugues's oldest comrade, his *fidus Achates*, who had been his best man at his marriage. He came when he liked, and very few weeks passed that he did not dine there.

Hugues treated him like a brother; Odette was always pleased to see him, although she was more reserved than became her towards her husband's best friend, and it sometimes happened that Monsieur de Malverne had to reproach her for her cold reception of the dear captain, who was the joy of the house; for he had wit, an open character, and a fund of good humour, although this last had been somewhat overclouded for some little time past by cares of which the magistrate fruitlessly endeavoured to discover the cause.

He fancied he knew it now, and he was counting on the malicious pleasure it would give him to hear Saint-Briac called over the coals by Madame de Malverne, during the dinner to which he had so reluctantly accepted the invitation.

At seven o'clock Odette, who had not seen her husband since the morning, was awaiting him in the little drawing-room, seated, or rather buried in an enormous cushioned sofa, and apparently plunged in a profound reverie. Her white hand was absently toying with a Japanese fan, and her eyes were following the movement of the hands of a time-piece in old Saxony. She was very pale, and a brown circle which surrounded her eyes showed that she had been crying.

The minutes passed, and Hugues, usually so punctual, did not appear.

Worn out with impatience, she rang the bell, and said to the footman who appeared:

"Has your master come in?"

"Half an hour ago, madame," replied the man; "he is dressing."

"Very well. Tell him that I am waiting."

As soon as she was alone, Madame de Malverne rose, looked at herself in the glass, dried her wet eyes, and took up an attitude like that of a soldier who is preparing for an inspection. She tried to smile and to put on a lively expression. She only half succeeded, and could not forbear a nervous start when her husband entered the room.

He was beaming, and came up to her with his arms extended to clasp her by the waist and imprint a hearty kiss on the face which she held up to him.

"How is it that you are so late?" she asked.

"Ah, I have a lot to tell you," replied the magistrate, rubbing his hands. "But why so distant? You won't be familiar when any one is here, not even before Jacques—I can submit to that, but when we are alone, it is a different thing, my darling Odette. Such a tone is not becoming between two lovers who love one another as much as they did the first day."

"Well," said Odette, "what has happened to keep you an hour later than usual?"

"If you imagine that an affair like that of Notre-Dame is easily unravelled!—All the afternoon was taken up with it, and I was in the attorney-general's room till six."

"What is the Notre-Dame affair?" stammered Madame de Malverne.

"Didn't you read the paper this morning?"

"Yes; and I saw the account of a suicide—a poor woman who threw herself from the top of——"

"Quite right! I remember now that they spoke of the fall, but they did not mention the crime."

"What! The unfortunate woman was——"

"Dashed on the pavement by a wretch whom we shall have, I am afraid, great trouble in finding. I will regale you during dinner with the full account of this mournful story. But I am surprised that Jacques has not come yet."

"Jacques!" cried the young woman. "You have seen him?"

"Yes; I invited him for this evening, and he accepted. It was the least he could do."

"And why did he not come to dinner yesterday?"

"I should prefer him to explain that himself. It would be much more amusing."

"Amusing! I don't understand."

"You will lose nothing by waiting a little, for I hope he will not disappoint us again. All that I will tell you now is that—prepare to be astonished—is that our friend Jacques—the good, the virtuous, the immaculate Jacques—has a mistress."

"A mistress!" repeated Madame Malverne, much moved.

"Goodness! yes. Does that astonish you?"

"A little, I confess."

"And yet it is a very natural thing. He is of an age when one loves, and he is very well qualified to make conquests."

"Certainly; but I never thought that he had what you men call a *liaison*; we see him so often."

"There is a time for everything," said the magistrate, laughing. "Saint-Briac finds time to see his flame, without neglecting his friends—and even to take long walks with her."

"And was it one of these walks which made him forget our invitation?"

"Something of that kind; but it was not his fault, and when you have heard the account of his adventure from his own lips you will be sure to forgive him."

"I hope he will not think of telling me——"

"Yes, yes. It is indispensable. And I hope you won't prevent him from confessing. He would think you were jealous of him."

"Your jokes are in very bad taste this evening, my dear Hugues. What is the reason of it, and why do you take a pleasure in vexing me thus?" replied Odette quickly.

"There! don't be put out. I was wrong to tease you, and what I have just said is improper, I admit. You must not be angry with me. I have passed such a disagreeable day that I am feeling the effects of it. I am quarrelsome, but it is all over now, and I——"

"Monsieur de Saint-Briac!" suddenly announced a footman, and almost at the same moment the captain entered the room.

"Here you are at last! cried Monsieur de Malverne. "I was beginning to wonder whether you were offended with us, and I warn you that you are in for a scolding. Odette is fearfully spiteful, and you will have to do all you know to win her favour again."

Saint-Briac shook his friend's hand, and bowed more ceremoniously than usual to Madame de Malverne. He seemed embarrassed, and yet shyness was not one of his faults. He was no longer the same man. You would have said he had aged since the day before, so marked was the alteration in his features.

"Dinner is on the table," said the footman, throwing open the folding doors of the dining-room.

"Good!" said the magistrate gaily, "you are rather upset still, but you will recover at table from your anxieties of yesterday. Give Odette your arm and come to dinner."

The captain obeyed, not without first exchanging an uneasy look with Madame de Malverne, and the husband walked in after them.

The dinner was served in the old family plate, and, as usual, was excellent, for Monsieur de Malverne was fond of good living, and his wife had also propensities in that direction.

Good cheer was to be found every day at their house, and their pot-luck was a hundred times better than the set feasts of wealthy citizens or high functionaries.

The wines, especially, were of the first order, and, as a rule, Saint-Briac did honour to them.

But he had spoken truly in the morning when he told Hugues that he should be a mournful guest that day, for it was as much as he did to moisten his lips in the Château-Yquem with which his glass was filled after the soup, and they had arrived at the second course without getting beyond the ordinary trifles which are a kind of preface to interesting conversation.

It was not that the desire to touch on a more engrossing subject was lacking to Malverne, but he was submitting to the torture common to all rich people who cannot do without servants. The footman's presence embarrassed him. He had to content himself for the time being with making allusions to the grave events of the day, which his wife only half understood and which the captain understood but too well.

"Did you go home, after leaving me at the Palais?" asked Hugues.

"Yes," answered Saint-Briac timidly, foreseeing awkward questions; "I went home, and did not go out until I came here."

"No doubt; you must have wanted to rest and compose yourself after such an ordeal. For my part, I was detained at the Palais till past six. You think, no doubt, that I was examining witnesses. Oh, certainly! During the whole of that time I was in consultation with the president and the attorney-general. You can't imagine the difficulty I had to convince them—it was no easy matter, I can assure you. It came to this, that I offered to abandon the case and hand it over to one of my colleagues."

"I foresaw that," stammered the captain, "and I am dreadfully sorry that you should be compromised for—"

"Don't be sorry. They listened to reason in the end, and gave me full powers. There will be nothing more heard of the stupid mistake on the part of the police commissary. They called him and gave him a dressing. The keeper of the towers will be dismissed to-morrow—which is only right, for it was his negligence which was the prime cause of the mistake."

Saint-Briac was silent; but from his attitude and face it was easy to see that he was on hot coals.

Madame de Malverne did not seem much easier. Her face was clouded, and she said with marked impatience: "Your conversation, gentlemen, is doubtless full of interest for you, but it is not very amusing for me, who do not know what you are talking about—and really you would do me an infinite favour by changing it."

"You are quite right, my dear, to call us to order," said her husband readily. "We will talk it all over after dinner, when we smoke

—since you are good enough to allow cigars in your little drawing-room. Let us converse on more lively subjects.”

And he began to dilate on the marvels of the new opera-house which was being finished, and whose magnificent staircase was drawing crowds to see it. He passed on to the new plays, green-room chat, and the latest society scandals. But he endeavoured in vain to re-animate the conversation; dinner finished more gloomily than it had begun, and at dessert Madame de Malverne rose with significant haste. Coffee was served in the boudoir, and as soon as the servant had disappeared she said, looking fixedly at her husband, who alone preserved his *sang-froid*: “Will you explain to me now the mysterious conversation in which you were engaged during dinner?”

“Mysterious for you, dear Odette,” said the magistrate smilingly. “It was not enigmatical for Jacques, and I prefer to leave him the pleasure of furnishing you with the key.”

“What is the good?” asked the captain quickly. “I’m sure it would not interest Madame de Malverne.”

“You are mistaken,” interrupted Odette, “it interests me much. What has happened to you?”

And as Saint-Briac did not hasten to reply:

“I will help him,” said Hugues. “Learn, in the first place, that since yesterday he has passed twenty hours in prison. I hope that is sufficient excuse for not dining with us.”

“In prison!” cried Madame de Malverne.

“Exactly so, my dear, and he would have been there still if he had had to deal with any other magistrate than myself. Fortunately, I got him out of the scrape—not without trouble, for it was a serious affair. He was charged with murdering a woman—nothing more! a woman with whom he was seen to ascend the towers of Notre-Dame—a woman—this is where the shoe pinches—a woman who is his mistress. Now that I have let the cat out of the bag, confess, Jacques, my fine friend—and fear nothing; the most virtuous women have always a weakness for rakes.”

Odette, who had grown pale on hearing the word prison, quickly recovered herself. The blood flowed in her cheeks again, and she looked at the guilty Saint-Briac without anger.

“Is it true?” she asked gently.

His head had sunk on his breast whilst Monsieur de Malverne was speaking; he lifted it, and replied without hesitation:

“Yes, madame, it is true. I was very nearly paying dear for an act of imprudence, but I should have borne my fate without complaint, because I knew that she whom I love more than my life had nothing to fear.”

“Oh, no,” cried Malverne with slight irony, “she had nothing to fear, for he would have forfeited his head rather than give her name. He would not even tell me! me, who saved him, and who would certainly have kept his secret.”

“He was right,” said Odette, in a firm tone.

“It is easy for you to talk, my dear. Do you know that the sublime discretion of our chivalrous friend forced me to assume a very heavy responsibility? Before releasing this paladin I should have

demanding proof that she was still alive, this mistress who likes to be adored two hundred feet above the ground which common mortals tread. I am certain that she is enjoying her health ; but, at any rate, another woman was thrown from the top to the bottom of the tower, and no one has recognised the unfortunate creature. Now, old magistrates are not credulous. They did not dare to act against my decision, but I believe they have doubts, and Jacques may expect to be watched until this affair is cleared up. It will be unfortunate for his amours—but he ought to consider himself lucky to escape so cheaply.”

“It was surely enough to be taken for a murderer !” murmured Madame de Malverne, with tears in her eyes.

“He only got what he deserved. In the first place, he had no right to tempt a married woman to stray from her duty. I should not have said so ten years ago, perhaps, but I have a right now to take the part of the husbands. Secondly, when a man embarks on this dangerous course, he does not choose an eccentric, a mad woman, who drags her lover up to the top of a tower. One of these days she will make him go up in a balloon.”

“She must have suffered cruelly since yesterday,” said Odette.

“Bah ! she knew nothing whilst Jacques was in prison, and now she is comforted. You have seen her, have you not ?” asked Hugues, looking keenly at his friend.

“Yes,” replied the captain hesitatingly.

“Well, my dear boy, you have made a fresh mistake, and I advise you to be careful in future. You can do very well without seeing her for a little time ; if not, I repeat, you will be caught—not as a murderer, but adultery is punishable by the Code, and the detectives who are watching you might inform the husband.”

“Is my name known, then ?”

“I was forced to disclose it. Besides, I told you I could not keep it secret. You have had warning. Take your precautions in consequence. Your fair one will resign herself to bewail your absence during a month—or to forget you.”

“She would be heartless !” murmured Madame de Malverne.

“What a miracle !” cried Hugues, joyously. “Odette takes your part, and I thought she would load you with reproaches, or at least give you a sermon. I congratulate you, my dear. Indulgence becomes virtuous women, and, besides, it would not do to treat Jacques’s accomplice too severely, for you are liable to meet her. He gave me to understand that we know her.”

“I did not say so !” cried the captain.

“You did not positively say so. But what you did say, when I questioned you in my room, authorizes me to suppose that the lady in question belongs to our circle of acquaintance. If she did not, you would not have refused categorically to give me her name. But I have teased you enough, and I do not want to weary Odette, who looks as if she would prefer to change the subject. Light your cigar and tell us something amusing. What is going on at the club ? I have not set foot in it for a week, and you go there every evening. What luck have you had lately ?”

“You know well that I don’t play.”

"I understand—one passion drives the other out—but baccarat is the less dangerous of the two, and I recommend you to return to it, if it were only to forget temporarily your bad fortune in your love affairs."

"Again!" murmured Madame de Malverne, casting a reproachful look at her husband.

"You are right. This confounded affair fills my brain, and my tongue runs on it in spite of myself. But I've finished now. Jacques will help me to change the conversation. Tell us, does fat Prébord still continue to lose?"

"I believe so," stammered the captain, more and more uneasy.

"There's a man who deserves to be ruined, or even something worse. He has a charming wife, and he passes all his nights at a green cloth, without troubling himself what she does to console herself for his absence."

"Every one is losing, in fact," said Saint-Briac. "They are beginning to get tired of it. The *hidalgo* wins enormous sums from them."

"The *hidalgo*?" repeated Malverne interrogatively.

"Yes, that Spaniard who joined the club last month."

"Oh yes, I remember; he has a curious name—Grand Corbeau or Du Corbeau——"

"His name is Pancorbo, and he calls himself a marquis; but in my opinion he is simply an adventurer."

"And yet it should be known who he is—he was introduced by two members who answer for his respectability."

"And who, perhaps, know no more of the mau's past history than we do."

"The fact is, that strangers are admitted to the clubs much too readily. This man's appearance is in his favour. He is very handsome, and has excellent manners, so far as I was able to judge on the evening you pointed him out to me in the exercise of his functions as banker at baccarat. He pays, and, above all, he receives, with a grace quite his own."

"Oh, he is a very fine player."

"I don't doubt it, but that is easy when one always wins. I should like to see him lose a large sum."

"Very well, try and win it off him."

"You forget that I have not touched a card since I have been a magistrate. My greatness forces me to be a spectator."

"That's just the reason why you should be lucky."

"Like deluded husbands are," said the magistrate, laughing. "I beg pardon, my dear Odette," he continued, on seeing a frown on his wife's face. "Our friend's misadventure has confused my ideas. But what is the matter? Don't you feel well?"

"No, your chatter has given me a headache, and I feel I want rest."

"Then, the best thing we can do is to leave you by yourself, for it would be no use being on our guard, we should keep on falling into allusions to Jacques's stupid adventure, not to mention that the smell of tobacco would only make your head worse. So if you will excuse us, my dear, we will go and smoke outside."

"I have no objection, and I sha'n't wait your return to go to bed. I can hardly keep up now."

"Would you like me to go to Dr. Valmont's and send him in?"

"No, dear; it is not worth while. A good night will put me all right, and I shall feel nothing of it to-morrow. Good night," added Madame de Malverne, holding out her right hand to her husband, who imprinted a kiss on it, and her left to Saint-Briac, who contented himself with shaking it.

She left them together in the drawing-room.

"What a fragile thing a woman is!" said Malverne. "My wife is very sensitive, and I see too late that I ought not to have said anything to her about the danger you have run. It was from a wish to make an excuse for your absence yesterday."

"I could easily have invented one."

"Yes, I was wrong. But it's done now; let us go and finish our cigars in the Champs-Élysées."

"As you like," said the captain resignedly.

Malverne preceded him through the garden, opened the gate, of which he had the key in his pocket, and they had only to pass through the shrubs to reach the open street. They were at liberty to resume the conversation interrupted by Madame de Malverne's abrupt departure, and yet they both were silent.

One would have said they were embarrassed, and they began silently to walk in the direction of the Rond Point.

It was towards the end of April, and the weather was splendid.

There were already leaves on the trees, pedestrians on the asphalt, and chairs occupied by intrepid loungers defiant of colds in the head.

The two friends walked side by side for some minutes without opening their mouths, and they had arrived at the Palais de l'Industrie when Hugues de Malverne said abruptly to his companion:

"You ought to marry, Jacques!"

"Marry!" repeated the captain, quite dumbfounded. "And why, might I ask?"

"Why, to avoid, in future, catastrophes like that of yesterday."

"I can remain a bachelor and avoid them."

"You are mistaken. A wild goose never laid a tame egg. You will start it again, and some fine day you will be discovered by the husband. You have just had an escape, and you do not know what trouble I had to hush the matter up, so far as it concerned you. I have engaged my honour to discover the murderer, and if I do not succeed, my only alternative will be to send in my resignation. And then, between ourselves, would you not be a hundred times happier than you are now, if you married a woman like Odette?"

"Yes, certainly," replied Saint-Briac, stealing a glance at his friend's face; "but it is impossible——"

"It would, perhaps, only have depended upon yourself, formerly. You knew her before her marriage, and I am only too pleased that you did not enter for the prize, for, in those days, you still wore your epaulettes, and her father, old General Benserade, had a weakness for soldiers. You did not put forward your claims, I was accepted, and I

congratulate myself on the fact every day. But she is not the only one in the world, and if you liked you could find another like her. Odette would manage it."

"I don't think so," murmured the captain.

"Would you like me to ask her?"

"After having told her that I have a mistress! You don't mean it, my dear Hugues."

"It is understood that you would give up this connection, which will end in your ruin."

"Well, when I am at liberty, we shall see. But, for the present, I beg as a favour that you will not risk a step which would offend your wife. She would think that I authorised you, and that I am making fun of her."

"Never! It is easy to see that you do not know what confidence is between two beings who love one another. It is absolute. Odette has never doubted me, and I have never doubted Odette. If you, who are my best friend, came and told me that she was unfaithful to me—swore it on your honour—I should not believe you."

"I!" cried Saint-Briac. "What a strange idea! and, in truth, since this wretched affair, you are no longer the same man. You seem to take a pleasure in offending all those who love you."

"Very unintentionally, at any rate," replied Malverne gaily. "You are very wrong to be put out over an absurd hypothesis. But I admit that I am not quite in my normal state. The covert reproaches which the president cast on me annoyed me, because I am not accustomed to that kind of thing. I can't get them out of my head, and I want to drive them out."

"Let us stroll to the club, shall we? It will divert my mind to watch a game of cards, and if the sight does not suffice to change the current of my ideas, I feel like having a game myself."

"It is not quite ten o'clock—they have hardly begun yet. In proof of which——"

"What? Why are you stopping? And at what are you looking so attentively?"

Saint-Briac did not answer immediately, and remained with his eyes fixed on a gentleman who had just alighted from a very elegant brougham, and had been accosted by a shabbily-dressed man.

"Well?" said Malverne, shaking his friend's arm.

"I am looking at the man whom I was describing to you a short time back as the king of baccarat—it is the Marquis de Pancorbo. Talk of the devil—you know the proverb?"

"Yes, I seem to recognise him. This noble marquis is speaking to a very questionable-looking individual. I am not astonished now that you should regard him with suspicion. What can he have to say to that man in the soft hat? Ah, the conference is at an end now. He is getting into his carriage again."

"He is going to the club, you may be sure of that, and he will get there before us."

"Let us go and look at him there. This man puzzles me—and I will have inquiries made about him. One is not a magistrate for nothing, my boy."

"I don't say you are wrong. Let us turn and go as far as the Place de la Concorde. The club is close to there, and I should like to go in, if only to make certain that they are not talking about my deplorable misadventure."

"How could they know about it? Do you think that magistrates can't keep a secret?"

"Magistrates are men, and, when they are married—you told Madame de Malverne of my misfortunes."

"I am peculiarly situated. You are an intimate friend of ours, and I am absolutely certain of Odette's discretion. But you can rest contented that nothing is known at the club."

"They know at least that you have the case in hand. Your name appears in an evening paper which I have just read and which refers to the crime."

"Well, if any one takes it into his head to question me, I shall answer him in such a manner that he will be glad to leave off. Let us hurry and go and pass an hour in the card-room, for I don't want to be late home. My wife is not well, and I can't go to bed without asking after her."

They walked along quickly as they talked, and they soon arrived at the club, which is at one of the corners of the Place de la Concorde.

The shabbily-dressed man whom they had seen had disappeared in the shadow, and the idea never struck them to follow him, although his acquaintance with the Spanish nobleman seemed to them suspicious.

They went in, and, after having left their overcoats in the hall, the first person they saw on entering the club-room was Monsieur de Pancorbo.

He had already a large group round him, and he was holding forth to his admiring auditors.

There was no one there but card-players, and they are always full of deference for a gentleman who makes big banks and wins their money.

Monsieur de Malverne and his friend did not join the group, but they did not move far away, and were able to examine the Castilian marquis at their leisure.

He was a fine man, tall, swarthy, strong, and about the same age as Saint-Briac, to whom he bore a slight resemblance.

He talked very good French, and without the slightest foreign accent.

"Marquis," cried one of the company, "what you have been telling us is very interesting, but we are losing precious time. The altar is prepared, and you are expected in the green room."

"Proceed thither, gentlemen. I will follow you," replied the *hidalgo* courteously, quitting the group which surrounded him. The players trooped off in a mass towards the room sacred to baccarat, and Malverne allowed himself to be drawn with the stream.

Saint-Briac, who had remained a short distance behind, was about to follow them, when, to his great surprise, he saw the marquis coming towards him with a smile on his lips. He waited, and Monsieur de Pancorbo accosted him and said;

"You would hardly believe, sir, how glad I am to see you here again."

This opening to the conversation completed Saint Briac's surprise, and he replied coldly:

"Why, sir? I come to the club every day, just as you do."

"You were not here yesterday, and I did not expect you this evening," replied the marquis, still smiling.

"I was not aware that you took such an interest in me, and I cannot accept as earnest the joy which you express at seeing me. We are but little acquainted, and you are as anxious about my absence as if I were your friend. You must have an object in talking to me in this way, and I desire to know what it is."

"You are totally wrong as to my intentions, sir, and it is quite natural that I should rejoice to see you here, after what happened to you yesterday."

"What do you mean?" asked the captain quickly.

"I thought you understood, for I imagined you saw me yesterday when you were crossing the precincts of Notre-Dame, with a numerous company. I found myself there by chance. I had been to see the cathedral, and I was just leaving it when, to my profound surprise, I saw you. You were escorted by two policemen, who were taking you to the hospital. I can understand, though, that you did not notice me. I was mixed up in the crowd, and you were hardly thinking of me at that time."

Saint-Briac could not help growing pale on hearing this unexpected statement. But emotion quickly gave place to anger, anger the more violent that he was forced to curb it, for the scene was occurring in a place where he had everything to fear from exposure.

"Sir," said he, in a strained voice, "I was indeed arrested yesterday, by error. I was mistaken for a wretch who had murdered a woman by throwing her from the top of one of the towers. It was sufficient that I should be recognised to be released, but I should be extremely annoyed if this ridiculous adventure got about, and if it becomes known here, I shall hold you answerable. I give you due warning."

"I might take offence at your tone," replied the marquis quietly, "but I can understand your irritation, and I will merely remark that if I had wished to spread the news of your arrest, I should not have waited until you were set at liberty. I passed the evening here yesterday, and I did not breathe a word as to what I had seen during the day. If I wished to speak to you, it was because it seemed to me to be more frank not to allow you to be ignorant that chance put me in possession of a secret which I shall not abuse. I consider that I have acted as a gallant man should, and I am pained to hear threats from your mouth, when I expected thanks. I can only add that that fact in no way modifies my intentions, and that you can rely on my discretion. Now, I have no more to say, and will let the matter drop, if you please."

Monsieur de Pancorbo's words were so clear, his accent so firm, and his air so frank that the captain was quite taken aback, and asked himself whether it would not be better to have this unexpected witness of his deplorable misadventure as a friend rather than as an enemy.

"Sir," said he, in a much less aggressive tone, "you speak in a way which makes me regret having been so ready to take offence. I have no need to blush for what happened to me, but I should not be the less obliged to you to preserve silence as to the fact you have just mentioned, for I refused to give my name to the police who arrested me. Fortunately, it happened that the magistrate before whom I appeared has been my friend for the last twenty years."

"This friend was Monsieur de Malverne, who came into the club with you," said the marquis.

"You know him?" cried the captain.

"I have seen him here sometimes, although he rarely comes, and was told his name; but I have not yet been introduced to him, to my great regret. I am not surprised that he should have released you this morning."

This dialogue was interrupted by Hugues de Malverne, who came into the room, calling out:

"Come along, Jacques! I have been waiting for you for the last ten minutes. The game is going to begin, and if you want to play you had better make haste."

Monsieur de Pancorbo, who was standing with his back to him, turned round and hastened to greet him.

Saint-Briac, surprised between two fires, could think of nothing better than to explain the situation to his friend. He imagined, too, that it would be best he should know it. It was an additional guarantee that the Spaniard would keep his promise of silence.

"My dear Hugues," said the captain, "this is Monsieur le Marquis de Pancorbo, who happened to be in front of the porch of Notre-Dame when the police conducted me to the hospital yesterday. He has been good enough to tell no one of what he saw, but I think you will be glad to have a word with him, for he knows that I owe my release to you."

"Certainly," replied the magistrate, without hesitation. "The marquis was right to tell you that he knew about it."

"Oh," cried the marquis, "it is very little that I know. I heard it said in the crowd that your friend was accused of having thrown from the top of the tower a woman whom I did not see. They had just taken the corpse to the hospital. The story appeared to me so absurd that I did not doubt he would clear himself."

"You might have helped him to do so."

"By saying that I knew him? I thought of that, but it struck me that I might embarrass instead of assisting him. I thought—I don't know why—that there was a woman mixed up in the affair, and that Monsieur de Saint-Briac would prefer to get out of the scrape by himself. I need not add that I proposed to interfere—later on—if the arrest had been followed by serious results; but I am glad now that I abstained, since Monsieur de Saint-Briac is free. It will not take you long to discover the author of this abominable crime, and, once safely in custody, there will be no further question of this mistake which was nearly having such terribly annoying consequences."

"There will be no further question of it, even if we should not succeed in capturing the real criminal. When justice goes wrong, she prefers that the public should know nothing of it, and I, who represent

her on this occasion, should be much obliged to you to be silent as to the error of which Monsieur de Saint-Briac was the victim."

"I shall be silent as the grave. But might I ask you whether there is any clue which will enable the police to trace the murderer?"

"None, at present. It is supposed that he escaped by the roof of the cathedral. He had ample time. The police went very badly to work in the first instance."

"The woman will be recognised at the Morgue, where she has been placed, so they tell me."

"I hope so, but I should not like to promise it. No papers were found on her, and the jewellery that she wore was not made in France. If, as everything tends to show, the unfortunate woman was a foreigner lately arrived in France, the chances are that no one will claim the body."

"I shall astonish you when I tell you that I went to see her to-day. It appeared to me, indeed, from certain peculiarities in her dress, that she was not French, and I, who have a large acquaintance in the foreign colony, am certain that I never saw her before. I am certain, too, that she is not one of my countrywomen. She is not after the Spanish type, as far as one can judge in the state in which she is. The head has been shattered by the fall, but she has fair hair, which is never seen among us. I shall make inquiries among my friends, and I shall learn whether a distinguished foreign lady has arrived recently. Will you allow me, sir, to communicate to you any information I may be able to gather?"

"I not only authorise, but I beg you to do so," replied Monsieur de Malverne. "Until the matter is cleared up I shall be in my room at the Palais every day from twelve o'clock till four."

"I shall not forget that. And supposing I obtained important information during the morning, might I be allowed to come to your house —"

"No. 59, Faubourg Saint-Honoré."

"I know; your house has been pointed out to me, and I hope soon to become your neighbour, for I am in treaty for the freehold of a house in the Rue de l'Elysée. For the present I am still at an hotel—the Continental. If ever you have any communication to make to me, it would only be necessary to address it there."

"Very well, sir," said the magistrate. "But the players are getting impatient, and must be pouring maledictions on my head. I do not wish to abuse your good nature."

"I owe them their revenge," said the marquis, smiling. "For the last month I have had an astonishing run of luck, but fortune will grow tired of favouring me. The day when she turns her back on me, I shall be delighted, gentlemen, to see you among the winners. I have a presentiment that it will be this evening, and if you care to try—"

"We shall see you again in the green room in a few minutes," interrupted Hugues de Malverne.

Monsieur de Pancorbo took the hint, bowed, and without adding a word went to join the baccarat players who, through the half-opened door, had been making signs to him to leave his companions and come and open a bank.

"Really, I'm out of luck," said the captain sadly, as soon as he was alone with his friend. "It was not enough to be arrested—this Spaniard must just be there in time to see me pass between two policemen."

"I should like to know what he was doing there," murmured Monsieur de Malverne.

"He says that he had just been to visit Notre-Dame."

"I don't believe a word of it. A man who passes his nights at baccarat does not employ his days in admiring the buildings of Paris. Certainly this man is a suspicious character, and I intend to carry out my first intention of having him watched."

"You are surely not going to imagine that he is the murderer?" asked Saint-Briac.

"I don't know about that."

"Recollect that nothing forced him to tell me that he was there when I was arrested."

"If he told you that, it was in order that you should know that it only rests with him to circulate this unfortunate story, and that he has a means of taking vengeance on you if you took it into your head to meddle with his affairs—which don't appear satisfactory to me. And the threat is indirectly addressed to me, who am your friend, and also a magistrate. He is no fool; but I sha'n't allow myself to be caught in the trap that he has set for me. I repeat, I shall inform the chief of police, who will give me an account of the life this man leads, and of his antecedents. To start with, we shall learn at the Spanish Embassy if a Marquis de Pancorbo exists on the other side of the Pyrenees, and as he is staying at the Hôtel Continental, there will be no difficulty in setting a watch on him."

"He may come and see you at the Palais, or even at your house; you gave him permission."

"Very well, let him come! If I had the least proof against him I could have him arrested in my room as well as anywhere else. It would be an odd thing if he put his head into the lion's mouth. But, in the meantime, you can count on his silence. Now, my dear Jacques, you will not be surprised that I have no desire to engage against this equivocal Castilian's bank. I shall go home. I am anxious to know how my wife is."

"I hope you will not mention Monsieur de Pancorbo to her."

"I shall take good care of that. It is more than enough to have given her a headache with talking about your misfortunes. Good night!"

"But—I am going with you."

"Not at all, not at all; stop here, I beg. Keep a watch on the *hidalgo*, and if he speaks to you after the game is over, try and get him to talk about the people whom he knows in Paris. Good night; I shall see you to-morrow, if possible."

The captain let his friend go, and remained very gloomy and perplexed. Monsieur de Pancorbo said nothing of importance to him, but he had no fancy for engaging in a struggle with him, for he felt unmistakably that his peace of mind was at the mercy of this dangerous foreigner.

Saint-Briac had reasons for not declaring war which he did not mention to Hugues.

In order to give himself time to reflect on the annoying complication which had just arisen, he decided to go and watch the game.

He found it in full swing. The marquis held the cards, and it did not appear as if his luck had forsaken him, for he had in front of him an imposing pile of counters, coin, and bank notes.

The gamblers were grumbling, and after each hand there arose a chorus of imprecations, which in no wise troubled the serenity of the banker.

Saint-Briac saw that the game might easily be prolonged till day-break, and that there was nothing to keep him there. His desire to play had passed away since his conversation with Monsieur de Pancorbo. It only remained for him to air his gloom and uneasiness in the Champs-Élysées as he walked home to the Avenue d'Antin.

He left the room, therefore, and at the foot of the stairs was not a little astonished to see, chattering with a footman, the shabbily-dressed man whom he had surprised talking to the marquis in the Champs-Élysées, half an hour before. This individual had just handed a letter to the liveried servant, and the captain had no trouble in guessing that this missive was addressed to Monsieur de Pancorbo. What could be the relations which existed between these two men? Saint-Briac asked himself this question, without being able to find an answer to it, and passed by before the suspicious messenger noticed him.

Once outside, the idea struck him to wait and see whether the noble Spaniard would come out with his strange correspondent, and he went and took up his position at the foot of one of the statues which surround the Place de la Concorde, fifty paces from the principal entrance to the club. He had not been there ten minutes when he saw in the distance Pancorbo and his acolyte walking side by side towards the row of cabs stationed along the park, between the Avenue Gabriel and the broad avenue which opens out at the Arc de Triomphe.

The news brought by the man must have been very important, for the marquis would not have abruptly left a game at which he was winning largely for a trifle. And it was singular that he should take a cab when his brougham was close by.

The captain at once resolved to follow him, and when he saw him halt at a cab—the first one in the rank—he walked rapidly towards the last one, awoke the driver on the box, and said :

“You see those gentlemen talking there? Follow the cab which they are going to take. Twenty francs if you do not lose sight of them.”

“Right!” replied the driver, gathering up his reins.

The shabbily-dressed man had just opened the door of the first cab, and Monsieur de Pancorbo, who was talking with him, was probably giving this satellite his last instructions. It did not appear that they had noticed Saint-Briac, for they were talking quietly, and even if they had seen him, they could not have recognised him at such a distance; whilst he, knowing full well with whom he had to deal, did not lose one of their movements.

He soon saw Monsieur de Pancorbo step into the cab, followed by his companion, and he waited until the cab they had taken had started. Thereupon he jumped into his own, calling out:

“Whip up, driver!”

He knew not what would come of this pursuit, but he imagined that it would be the means of procuring for him useful information as to a person who appeared more and more suspicious, and upon whom he already looked as his enemy.

Where could Monsieur de Pancorbo be going in company with such an evil-looking individual? Certainly he was not taking him to the Hôtel Continental, where he was staying, and where the introduction of such a vagabond would have scandalised the porter and the servants.

Had the inarquis another domicile in Paris, and did he lead a double life, a fine gentleman during the day and a bandit at night? Was he going this evening to some lonely spot to take command of a band of ruffians collected for some criminal expedition? All these suppositions were most improbable; but the captain, whose brain was in an excited state, was not in a condition to reason calmly.

However, he was not mistaken on one point; instead of going towards the Hôtel Continental, by way of the Rue de Rivoli, the cab which carried the *hidalgo* had just turned to the right and passed up the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées.

It was not going very fast, and Saint-Briac's driver had no difficulty in following it without being distanced. The captain was resolved to go through with this adventure, after having embarked upon it very lightly, but he began to ask himself what he should do when Pancorbo stopped. He was by no means desirous of running up against him, for he could not have done so without confessing that he had just been tracking him like a detective, and it would have been distasteful to him to confess himself neither more nor less than a spy.

And then, what excuse could he give for this pursuit? To have demanded an explanation of this drive with an ill-favoured companion would have been simply to provoke a man who had it in his power to spread abroad the story of his arrest, not to mention the fact that this Spaniard would have a perfect right to address some home truths to him; to tell him, for instance, that he was not conducting himself as a gentleman. Now, it was not a duel which the captain sought—for he had fought many and feared no man—but enlightenment. And, in order to obtain it, it was necessary that he should not show himself.

“Bah!” said Saint-Briac to himself, “when I have seen what house he enters, I shall be satisfied for this evening, and to-morrow I will relate my expedition to Malverne, who will do the needful to complete the information which I give him.”

At heart Saint-Briac regretted having embarked on a hazardous enterprise which might end in nothing. Suddenly the cab to which he was giving chase left the grand avenue, entered the Rue Marbeuf, and stopped almost immediately.

The captain let down one of the front windows, and told his driver not to go any further.

Saint-Briac was anxious to avoid encountering Monsieur de Pancorbo, but he wished to see what was about to happen, to see without

being seen, and his driver had the sense to pull up his horse twenty paces from the other cab, which was now standing close to a lamp-post. The Rue Marbeuf descended, in those days, by a very sharp incline towards some hollows which have since been filled up, and which were then sparsely inhabited.

It was an almost unknown neighbourhood, a kind of subterranean city where dwelt a strange population, herded in hovels made out of disused timber. A few houses of stone, destined shortly to disappear, were still standing, but the tenants had abandoned them, having been driven out by the levelling operations undertaken by the town to transform this corner of Paris.

At night especially it was a cut-throat looking place. It was quite dark there, at fifty yards from the Champs-Élysées with their sparkling lights, and few people ventured thither.

What could the noble marquis be in search of in this den? This was the question which the captain asked himself, when he saw the shabbily-dressed man who had come to fetch Monsieur de Pancorbo from the club alight from the cab.

Saint-Briac expected to see the problematical *hidalgo* appear also; but, to his great surprise, the man shut the door again, paid the coachman, and ran rapidly down the street.

What had become of the Spaniard? The captain imagined he would turn back in order to regain the Hôtel Continental. He soon abandoned this idea, for the driver turned round, and, on passing his comrade, commenced an instructive dialogue with him from his box-seat.

"I've just been driving a queer kind of chap," he cried. "He engaged me at the Place de la Concorde, but two of them got into the cab, and only one remained. The first one only walked through my cab. He got in at one door and out at the other. Case of throwing police spies off the scent; they only saw him disappear in a flash of light. It's all the same to me, and the one I drove here is a good sort; he gave me a hundred sous for the drive."

"And then, you've let the police into the secret," sneered the other one; "that's worth another hundred sous."

The captain saw the cab which he had followed pass close by his own, and one glance satisfied him that it was empty.

The expedition had failed, for he could not think of plunging into the dark turnings of the Rue Marbeuf in order to give chase to the Spaniard's satellite. The man had a start; Saint-Briac could not have overtaken him, and he would have needlessly exposed himself to an ambush.

He carried away with him from his journey at least the certainty that Monsieur de Pancorbo led a shady kind of life, and that he was anxious that no one should interfere in his affairs.

The cab trick had been cleverly executed, and the captain had been completely taken in by it.

It would not have mattered so much if this had not been the commencement of hostilities. But the Spaniard evidently did not mean the affair to rest there. He had seen that Saint-Briac was watching him, and he would endeavour at any hazard to rid himself of a troublesome spy.

Henceforward war was declared, and a war which threatened to turn out badly for the captain, the lover of a married woman whose reputation he was anxious to save at any price.

He began to see that he had committed a foolish act, and that his wisest plan would be to leave this dangerous person alone.

But he felt need of repose, after the varied emotions of this eventful evening, and he decided to make his way home.

The Avenue d'Antin is not far from the Rue de Marbeuf, and he was not sorry for an excuse to walk. He discharged his cab, after having generously paid the driver, and walked down the Champs-Élysées as far as the Rond Point, where he halted a moment to make certain that he was not being followed.

Since his misadventure of the day before, he had become suspicious and mistrustful of every one and everything. He lived at the end of the Avenue d'Antin, between the Rue Jean Goujon and the Cours-la-Reine, on the first floor of a handsome new house, where he occupied a large set of chambers, furnished by him according to his own taste. There was abundance of air and space, and each room had its own purpose.

There was no false luxury in this comfortable abode. Saint-Briac had not fallen into the ridiculous mistake of turning his rooms into old curiosity shops. There were but few books and pictures, but what there were were well chosen. Neither were there any knick-knacks. There are some bachelors' chambers which seem to have been arranged for a woman to live in, and where even the furniture seems to have a sex. Saint-Briac's furniture was masculine.

He had no other servants than a valet—an old cuirassier who had served in his squadron—and an English groom, to take charge of his two saddle-horses, which were kept in a well-appointed stable in the court-yard.

The ex-captain lived the life of a sage, without spending more than his income, and he had been the happiest of men until the day when a serious love passion had wrecked his heart and for ever destroyed his peace of mind.

And now he saw catastrophes coming upon him which he was powerless to fight against.

On arriving at home he was in that frame of mind when the least incident is disquieting, and he knit his brows on perceiving a letter which his man had placed in a conspicuous place on the smoking-room table. This letter bore the seal of his club, and the handwriting was unknown to him.

He opened it feverishly, and at the first glance he saw that it was not signed.

It only contained about thirty lines, but in its brevity contrived to say much.

"Sir," wrote the anonymous correspondent, "I imagined that you had understood me, and that we could come to terms. I possess your secret, and I wanted nothing better than to be silent, on condition that you did not endeavour to know mine. I proposed to you mutual silence, and you had everything to gain by this arrangement, for I, for

my part, have nothing to fear from your indiscretion, since you know nothing about me, and will never know more.

"You have thought fit to play the spy; I have just found this out on the Place de la Concorde, and, on this occasion, I was content to mystify you. But, as you will probably carry it on, I consider it my duty to warn you that at the first attempt of this kind I shall make you repent of having meddled with what did not concern you. My vengeance is prepared—a cruel vengeance. You think, perhaps, that I shall be content with spreading abroad the story of your arrest? You are mistaken. I shall do more. I know the woman who was with you yesterday, the woman whose name you refused to give to your friend the magistrate. Well, I shall tell him her name, and when he knows it, we shall see what he will do with you and your companion. You are warned. Act accordingly."

This was all.

The letter fell from Saint-Briac's hands; he could only murmur:

"Odette at this wretch's mercy! Ah! I will kill him—I must kill him."

IV.

TEN o'clock has struck by the hospital clock. Albert Daubrac has finished his morning round; he has just taken off his house-surgeon's apron and, instead of going to breakfast with his comrades, he is preparing to go out.

He had received the evening before a note from Mériadec, begging him to come and see him as soon as possible, and as he had been disappointed in his visit to the magistrate, he is anxious to know how the Notre-Dame affair is progressing.

Not that he is inordinately interested in it; this is not the first one he has seen, and he is still ignorant of all that his friend in the Rue Cassette knows. But he cannot quite forget it, since he has been summoned as a witness; and he wishes, before giving his evidence, to see the good Mériadec. He has stopped under the peristyle of the hospital to light a cigar; he takes a few pulls at it and, before going any further, he takes a glance at the old cathedral, which for centuries past has reared itself, immovable and sombre, above the precincts.

All trace of the late drama has disappeared. The rain has washed away the blood which stained the paving-stones; the Place is almost deserted. No one passes but a few old women, who glide into the cathedral to hear mass. This is not a visitors' day, and there is no crowd besieging the hospital.

"The materials are still the same, but the scene has changed," thought Daubrac. "No one any longer thinks of the poor wretch who took the fearful leap yesterday, and I begin to think that she did it intentionally. If the magistrate had not made up his mind that she committed suicide he would have heard my evidence yesterday. The inquiry is closed; the police commissary is a fool, and the painter who started us on this business must have seen double. It is the keeper of the towers who will have to pay the piper. They will turn him

away, and God knows what will become of the Angel of the chimcs. Poor girl ! I should be glad if I could do anything for her—but I have no influence among the artificial flower manufacturers, and I don't suppose she would care to become a nurse."

The house-surgeon's reflections were interrupted by a sound which he well knew, from having heard it often at the bedsides of dying patients. Some one was sobbing behind him. He turned round, and saw a young girl leaving the hospital and hiding her face in her handkerchief. He recognised her by her fair hair, and said quickly :

"You here ! What has happened ?"

"My father ! my poor father !" murmured Rose Verdière, in tears.

"Well ! has he tumbled from the top, too ?" asked Daubrac, who had a bad habit of making ill-timed jokes.

"He had a fit last night," said the girl, casting a reproachful glance on him.

"A paralytic fit ! the deuce ! that's serious. And they have just brought him into the hospital, haven't they ? In which ward is he ?"

"The Saint-André ward."

"Good ! the surgeon is a friend of mine ; I will recommend your father to his special attention, and if he can be saved he will be."

"They have just told me his case is hopeless," sobbed Rose.

"We must not despair," said Daubrac affectionately, moved by the sight of this sincere grief ; "we will do all we can to save him. But you, what are you going to do—you who have only him ? Are you going to remain alone in the tower ?"

"I was turned out this morning."

"Turned out ?"

"Alas ! yes. My father got notice yesterday, after the unfortunate affair that you know about. I can't take his place, and the post must not remain unoccupied. The new keeper entered on his duties this morning. It only remains for me to seek a place to lay my head, and I do not know where to find one."

"I have one to offer you—Oh ! don't misunderstand me ; my intentions are good, and I know you too well to propose to you to live with me. In the first place, I live in the hospital, and even if I had a splendid house your place would not be with me. But you can't live in furnished rooms. At your age, and with your beauty, it would be to expose yourself to terrible dangers."

"I know, but where can I go ?"

"Can you trust me ? You know me but slightly, but I hope you believe me incapable of deceiving you."

"Yes," said the young girl sincerely.

"Very well, I have an idea, and if you agree to it, I can get over the difficulty. You remember the gentleman who came up the tower stairs with me—not the tall one in a red cap—the other, the one with a broad-brimmed hat ?"

"Yes, an hour after you had gone he came back alone ; he spoke to me."

"Hullo ! hullo !" said Daubrac, to himself. "I didn't know he had gone up again to see you—but I'm not surprised at it."

"He didn't come to see me—he went up to the gallery ; he found a child whom he took away with him."

"A child !—that's something fresh—it's no doubt to tell me of this find that he is so anxious to see me. But to return to you—what do you think of my friend ?"

"I think nothing but well of him—he has a frank, open face. During the short talk we had he expressed great interest in me."

"Then, he is not displeasing to you ?"

"Certainly not."

"Did he tell you his name ?"

"I did not ask it."

"He is the Baron de Mériadec. He is well off, and has no other occupation than that of benefiting all around him. He was created and placed on this earth to defend the weak and to protect innocence. Add to that, that he has reached an age when he can constitute himself the guardian of a young girl without compromising her."

"I have nothing to say against that, but what do you propose to do ?"

"To ask you if you would have any objection to placing yourself under his protection. He is not married, it is true ; but he is absolutely incapable of abusing your confidence. I can answer for him better than I could answer for myself ; that is not saying much, perhaps, but I swear to you, upon my honour, that you will never have to repent of having accepted the hospitality which he will esteem himself very happy to offer you."

"I !—live with him !—you surely don't think of it !"

"I think of it so much that I am ready to take you there. He lives in the Rue Cassette, in a little house which seems to have been built for the express purpose of sheltering two families, for it consists of a dwelling-house and a detached building. He lives there all alone, and is waited upon by a good woman who would go through fire and water for him. Why should you not occupy this out-building ? It is very plainly furnished, and there would be room there for a flower-maker's workshop. You could live by your work there, as free from harm as in your room in the north tower, and that good Mériadec would never enter it without your permission."

"But, sir," objected the girl, "your friend hardly knows me—why should he interest himself in me ?"

"I repeat to you," replied Daubrac, "that he interests himself in all those who are in suffering. He knows you, besides, much better than you think, for I spoke to him about you at some length, and you must know that I said nothing wrong of you."

"I believe it—but that is no reason to dispose of him and his house without consulting him."

"That signifies nothing. Let us consult him. The Rue Cassette is not at the antipodes. We can get there in a quarter of an hour in a cab. Let us go there."

"I should never dare," murmured Rose Verdière.

"It's simple enough, and less difficult than going and asking for a lodging of some one who will take you for what you are not. That is what you will be forced to do, if you do not accept what I propose ; for you can't remain in the streets."

Rose cast down her eyes and was silent, but her face showed that she felt all the force of the argument which Daubrac put before her.

"Don't be anxious about the reception which my friend will give you," he continued. "You will be received with open arms, and he will treat you as if you were his daughter. Besides, it will only be a temporary stay. Your father will recover, I hope, and when he leaves the hospital you will go and live with him. But, in the meanwhile, you can do nothing better than go and live in the room which Mériadec will be only too glad to place at your disposal."

The girl raised her head, looked in the surgeon's face, and said, in a firm tone:

"Swear to me, on your honour, that in giving me this advice you have no further intention."

"Ah! you are mistrustful!" said Daubrac gaily. "Very well; yes, I have an intention—that of seeing you more often than I should see you if you continued perched up in the tower, like the rooks. I think you are charming. I should be delighted to find favour with you, in an honourable way, but I esteem you too much to pay court to you, after the fashion of the Latin Quarter. Besides, if even I had such an idea, Mériadec would see to it. He knows your worth, and he would stand no nonsense of that kind. You will be better looked after in his house than in a convent. I tell you so, and if you knew me better, you would know that I never told a lie in my life—never, not even to girls."

"Very well, I believe you, and I am ready to follow," said Rose Verdière simply.

"That's right? You don't take me for a coxcomb who wants to seduce you! I should be a villain indeed to lay a trap for you. You are not a stranger to me. For the last six months that I have been perched up at the top of the hospital, I have seen you pass every day, and you can imagine that I have made inquiries about you. I know everything that you do, and I am certain that no one leads a purer life than you do. A chance offers itself to be of service to you; don't be surprised that I embrace it, and let me have my way. When you have seen Mériadec, you will thank me for having taken you to him. But I am chattering away when I have no need to protest my good intentions, and if we wait here we shall miss our friend of the Rue Cassette. Come, we shall find a cab on the Quai Saint-Michel."

Rose, who had quite made up her mind, descended into the Place with Daubrac, and five minutes afterwards they were rolling along in a cab towards the baron's house, who was very far from expecting a visit from the Angel of the chimes.

The young girl had proposed to go on foot, but she had followed the doctor's advice, who did not wish that the students, on seeing them pass, should think that he was taking his mistress out for a walk.

Rose was serious and reserved, as became the occasion, but Albert enlivened the journey by his conversation. He inquired what kind of life she led with her father; about the shop which gave her work; the money which she could earn by flower-making; he asked her if the furniture in the room in the tower belonged to her father, and was

grieved to learn that it was the property of the dealers, so that the poor child would have nothing to move but her clothes and linen.

He learnt, too, that she had lost her mother ten years before, and that she would be left alone in the world if old Verdière did not recover from his fit. And when he knew this past, limpid as crystal, and this threatening future, he was more enthusiastic than ever over his idea of placing Rose under Mériadec's protection.

"But tell me about this child which my friend discovered on the top of Notre-Dame," he said suddenly. "What the deuce was the youngster doing there?"

"Monsieur Mériadec had not time to tell me. He seemed to be in a great hurry to take him away," replied Rose. "And then, I dared not question him. Only, the idea struck me that the little boy had perhaps gone up with the unfortunate woman who fell from the top of the tower. I was not there when she came, and I did not see her."

"I am pretty certain you have guessed rightly, and I would bet that we shall find the lost child in the Rue Cassette. Mériadec's dream is to make his home an orphanage. And it has just happened right—you are so good that you must love children."

"I adore them."

"Very well, this one will keep you company. And if, as I suspect, he was mixed up in the drama of the towers—" Daubrac did not finish his sentence. The cab had just stopped at a little door built in a long wall.

"Here we are," said the doctor. "The home of the last of the Mériadecs does not look promising from the outside, but you would be wrong to judge by appearances. Come in."

The door was not locked; he had only to turn the handle to let Rose Verdière in and follow her into a court-yard surrounded on three sides by a one-storied building.

The house was not new; it must have been uninhabited many years, for the walls were covered with parasites, and the grass grew plentifully between the stones of the court-yard.

"There is the room which you will occupy," said Daubrac, pointing towards the left wing of this very modest mansion. "Mériadec's rooms are in front, and you will be separated from them by a part of the house which is not inhabited. Mériadec has not had it furnished yet."

"Really," murmured the girl, "you dispose of his house as if it were your own."

"It is as if it belonged to me. You will see." And he called in a voice which sounded like a trumpet, "Mériadec!"

Almost immediately a window opened on his right, and the baron appeared, clad in a sort of frock of coarse woollen material, which was nothing else than a burnous which he had brought back from Algeria, and as he had donned the hood of this singular dressing-gown, Rose Verdière did not recognise him at first, but he recognised her at the first glance, for the sweet face of the Angel of the chimes appeared with the light full on it.

Mériadec gave vent to a joyous exclamation, left the window abruptly, and rushed downstairs.

"Whatever shall I say to him?" murmured the young girl.

"Nothing at all," replied the surgeon, laughing. "I will speak for you."

And he spoke well. Without any equivocation or attempt at effect, he explained the situation briefly and clearly to Mériadec, who had hurried down into the court-yard, and who listened with delight.

Rose, reassured by the baron's reception, put in her word too, by beginning to excuse herself for having come to demand hospitality of a bachelor, as pilgrims demanded it from the monasteries in the olden days.

Mériadec did not allow her time to conclude her speech. He interrupted her in order to thank her for the pleasure she was giving him in lodging beneath his roof, and he poured out protestations of devotion which seemed superfluous, for the expression on his face was eloquent enough. It was beaming, and he was so affected that he had the greatest difficulty in finding words in which to express himself.

The house-surgeon, who never lost his self-possession, came to their aid. He proposed that they should show Rose Verdière the house which she would inhabit, and he asked his friend whether the building on the left was ready to receive the young girl.

"Quite ready," replied the excellent baron. "I have put a child there: but you know there are three rooms, of which two are bedrooms."

"A child!" cried the doctor. "I thought so. Have you taken it to nurse?"

"I will explain to you how and why I have taken it in. You will approve, I am sure. Mademoiselle, too, will approve."

"Don't explain anything to me. I know where it comes from. I told Monsieur Daubrac that you found it on the gallery which connects the two towers of Notre-Dame," said Rose.

"And I," said Daubrac, "guessed that it was his mother who was killed on the pavement. You did well to give food and shelter to this little deserted bird, but you can't keep it indefinitely."

"I shall keep it at least until I have discovered the unhappy woman's murderer."

"Certainly; then the gentleman whom we caused to be arrested was not the murderer? Rumour had it, yesterday evening, that he had been released."

"It was not he, I am certain. I know the guilty man. I have seen him at the Morgue, where he had the audacity to go to look at his wife's corpse."

"What! His wife's?"

"Yes; the wretch is the husband of the dead woman and the father of the child whom I have brought home."

"What do you know about it?"

"The child recognised him at the Morgue, and told me the whole story. He and his parents are Russians. He had arrived in Paris that very morning with his mother. The father awaited them there, firmly resolved to rid himself of both."

"And he succeeded. But justice will have no difficulty in tracking him. You have given information, I suppose?"

"No. I could have said nothing precise. The child does not know his surname. He knows that his father is called Paul Constantinowitch ; his mother, Xenia Iwanowna, and himself Sacha—otherwise Alexander ; he knows no more.

"It's very curious ; it would be a joke to make a search for the villain who did the deed."

"That was my first thought, and if you had not come this morning I should have come and proposed to you to help me in this undertaking. I have already got an auxiliary—Jean Fabreguette."

"He has no stability."

"More than you think. It only rests with you to judge. He is here at this moment, and when you called me we were engaged in forming a plan. But we are forgetting that Mademoiselle Verdière is exposed to the sun in this courtyard, and that it is time to show her the home which she consents to inhabit."

"If I still hesitated to accept the hospitality which you are good enough to offer me, the child's presence would decide me," said Rose eagerly. "I will care for him as if he were my own."

"I shall be the more thankful to you that he will not let my servant go near him. He is proud and fierce, so much so that I myself have no control over him."

"You will allow me to try and tame him."

"I allow you!—I beg of you to do so. You will do me an immense service, for he will obey no one, and gets dreadfully tired of being with me. There is not room enough for him in my small house, and he passes his time in running from one building to another. Thus, just now, we were trying to get him to talk, Fabreguette and I. He would hardly answer us. He left us abruptly, and I believe he has gone and shut himself up in his room."

"I should advise you to leave him there," interrupted Daubrac. "And as you said just now that his room is near the one which you intend for Mademoiselle Rose, I invite you to do the honours of your own apartments. We shall find your artist there, but I hope that he will behave himself with propriety in mademoiselle's presence."

"If he was to allow himself to be wanting in respect to her," said Mériadec quickly, "he would not remain a minute longer in my house ; but I can answer for him."

"Then come along, mademoiselle ; you will find that our friend Mériadec is not so badly lodged. He has taste, and he has brought back from his travels a heap of curiosities which will interest you."

Rose readily entered with the two gentlemen a spiral staircase, which opened directly into the court-yard.

She did not do so without having raised her eyes towards the windows of the other wing, and it appeared to her that she perceived, behind the panes, between two curtains, a child's face, which was looking at her

Fabreguette, for his part, had put his head out of the window, and they found him standing up, knocking the ashes out of his pipe on the marble chimney-piece. When the young girl entered, he made up his mind to take off the celebrated red cap—a thing he only did on great

occasions, and he saluted Rose by a scrape of the left foot, after the fashion of a bumpkin at a fair.

"Now, my dear fellow," said Daubrac to him, "you will do us the favour of suppressing all humbug and practical joking. We are not in your studio now."

"Do not be uneasy, my lord," replied the artist. "I respect the ladies, and I have already had the honour of seeing mademoiselle in the north tower."

Mériadec handed an easy chair; Rose seated herself in it, and Daubrac sat astride of a wooden bench which the baron must have brought from the wilds of Brittany.

"How far had you got?" asked the house-surgeon. "You were deliberating what to do to capture the man you saw in the Morgue. I shall join the band."

"I counted on you," said Fabreguette, placing his elbows on the table at which he had just taken a seat. "Will mademoiselle join us too?"

Daubrac was about to resent this, when Rose answered:

"I shall take care of the child whilst you seek the murderer."

"The very thing!" cried the artist. "The plot is complete now. A charming woman and three brave knights, against one cowardly villain. It only remains to come to an understanding with the fine gentleman who was arrested in the place of this scamp——"

"Hark! there is some one coming up the stairs. Supposing it were he?"

A hesitating step was heard on the stairs, and soon two taps at the door announced a visitor, who was evidently uncertain of the reception he would meet with.

Mériadec rose hastily, went and opened the door, and found himself face to face with a man whom he recognised immediately.

Fabreguette had guessed rightly. This man was the prisoner whom the magistrate had released the day before, and whom the baron had met on the Boulevard du Palais.

"Excuse me, sir," said he politely; "I came to ask you to grant me a few minutes—But I see you are not alone."

"Come in, sir," said Mériadec heartily. "There is no one here whom you do not know, and we are all the more pleased to see you that we were just talking about you."

"But you did not expect me, I believe. I did not know your name and address, which I have just learnt from my friend, Monsieur de Malverne—the magistrate who summoned you to give evidence and was not able to examine you. I know that I am speaking to a gallant man, and I have no hesitation in introducing myself. I am a retired cavalry officer, and my name is Jacques de Saint-Briac. Need I add that I have come to talk about the unfortunate affair in which chance has caused you to be concerned?"

"And which was the result of a deplorable mistake. We are all concerned in it—I, my friend Daubrac, house surgeon at the hospital; Monsieur Fabreguette, artist; Mademoiselle Rose Verdière."

Mériadec had turned round and pointed them all out as he named them. The captain bowed to them, and said:

"I congratulate myself on finding them here, and I can explain before them the object of my visit."

The baron handed Saint-Briac a chair, which the latter took, and, as soon as every one was seated, Daubrac spoke.

"Sir," said he, with an unembarrassed air, "there is no great merit in guessing that you have come to ask our dear friend Mériadec whether he cannot give you any information as to the villain who committed the crime. You are fortunate. Mériadec has seen him."

"And I too," said Fabreguette.

"And we met together here to come to an understanding. We have sworn to find the murderer. The question is, to know how we shall set about it. We were deliberating, and your presence is welcome. Your wrong against this villain is more bitter than ours. These two gentlemen and I owe him a grudge for having made us play an odious and ridiculous part. He was the cause of our having you arrested. Mademoiselle owes to him the destitution of her father, who has just lost his place as keeper of the towers. But you, sir, had a narrow escape of the assizes, and you must be still more anxious than we to deliver this man over to the magistrate who recognised your innocence."

"I should prefer another revenge," said Saint-Briac.

"Yes, I understand. You would wish to avoid the exposure of a trial, in which you will possibly figure, and which would perhaps compromise a woman—but you don't propose to shoot him if he is pointed out to you, and you would confer much too great an honour on him in fighting a duel. You will therefore have to resign yourself to allow justice to take its course. But we have not arrived at that point, since we have not captured him. Mériadec and Fabreguette have seen him, but he escaped them. It would be only right for you to know under what circumstances, and Mériadec will tell you the story."

The baron did so, beginning with his second visit to the towers of Notre-Dame. He told how he had found Sacha, what he had done with him, and what had happened at the Morgue.

Rose and Fabreguette confirmed the story, to which Saint-Briac listened with natural interest, but without manifesting the satisfaction which he might well have felt.

The truth was, that the poor captain had passed some doleful hours since the receipt of Monsieur de Pancorbo's letter. He had not gone to bed, and night had not brought counsel. Daybreak had found him hesitating more than ever between the ardent desire to punish a cowardly scoundrel and the fear with which the threats of this enigmatical Spaniard, who possessed his secret, inspired him.

It was not for himself that he feared, but he trembled for Madame de Malverne. And he began to curse this love which had sprung from the remembrances of their youth. They had loved in former days, without telling one another, and when they had met, after Odette's marriage, their slumbering passion had awoke again. They had struggled for a long time against the irresistible longing which attracted them one to the other; then a moment had come, a moment of transport, when they had forgotten that Hugues de Malverne, the best and most confiding of husbands, was the intimate friend of Jacques; a fatal moment, which had made a hell of their life, for they were both

conscious of the gravity of their fault, and the courage to resist was lacking.

Saint-Briac had come to despise himself, and after his misadventure in Notre-Dame he thought of killing himself or leaving the country. But, now that he knew that Monsieur de Pancorbo had it in his power to ruin Madame de Malverne's good name, he had no longer the right to disappear from the scene, for it would have been to abandon Odette to the vengeance of an adventurer whom no scruple would withhold, when he, Saint-Briac, was not there to defend her.

It was necessary, then, at any price to get rid of this so-called marquis. But how? Would this man consent to fight? By what pretext could he provoke him? To denounce him would be to hasten the catastrophe. And besides, the captain had no proof as yet that Pancorbo was the murderer.

After a long period of cruel torture he had made up his mind to first gather some information. Among those who had caused him to be arrested he had particularly noticed Mériadec, and he resolved to see him before taking any steps. Thus he had gone, under pretext of inquiring after Madame de Malverne's health, to ask the magistrate for this witness's address, and without further deliberation he had driven to the Rue Cassette, where he little expected to find such a numerous company. He almost regretted having come, for he did not know how to decline Daubrac's offer, who proposed to him to join the campaign which the three musketeers, as Fabreguette called them, were about to open against the murderer.

"Unfortunately we were not able to stop him," said Mériadec, in conclusion, "and I only caught a glimpse of him. But I believe I should know him again."

"What sort of a looking man is he?" asked the captain.

"He is tall and broad-shouldered, but well built. He has regular features, swarthy complexion, very dark hair and eyes, and only wears a moustache."

This description reminded him so much of Monsieur de Pancorbo that Saint-Briac, struck by the coincidence, asked how old the individual appeared to be.

"About your age," replied Fabreguette, "and I think he is rather like you. At a distance one might mistake you for one another. But if you like to form an opinion on it yourself I will show you a sketch which I made of him a quarter of an hour after seeing him. It is not very finished, for I only saw him for an instant, but it is enough to give one some sort of idea of the man, as I saw him."

The artist took from his pocket a small sketch-book, which he was never without, for he more often worked in the street than in his garret, opened it, turned to the page and placed it before Saint-Briac, who cried:

"It is he!"

"What?" said Fabreguette; "you have seen him, then?"

"No," stammered Saint-Briac, "I mean that this portrait resembles—"

"Some one whom you suspect to be the murderer?" said Daubrac.

"You are right. But suspicions are not sufficient, and I am by no means certain."

"Never mind," cried Mériadec, "Tell us upon what your suspicions are based. It will be a starting point at any rate, and your information may put us on the scoundrel's track. I say us, for I am relying on you to join us in the enterprise we are about to undertake."

Saint-Briac, thus driven into a corner, was forced to explain his position. He thought that, after all, he had to deal with honourable men, and that it would be better to frankly explain the situation to them, without, however, confiding to them the grand secret, that is to say, Madame de Malverne's name.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you know that at the moment when the crime was committed I was on the gallery of Notre-Dame with a lady whose name I refused to give; you can guess why."

"Certainly; and each of us would have done the same in your place," said the doctor.

"I refused to mention her name, even to the magistrate, who, fortunately, is one of my best friends, and who was willing to accept my statement—as far as it went. I was released immediately, and, like you, I swore to discover the villain for whom I had been taken. It was no easy matter, since I had no clue to put me on his track. A most unexpected chance furnished me with one. Yesterday evening, in the club of which I am a member, I was accosted by a foreigner whom I know but slightly, and who told me without any preamble that he had seen me the day before, crossing the precincts of the cathedral between two policemen. This statement appeared to me singular, although it was accompanied by protestations of secrecy. I asked myself how this man came to be there just in time to see me pass, and the idea struck me that he had just come down from the south tower."

"Is this foreigner a Russian?" asked Fabreguette.

"No, he is a Spaniard, and looks it. But he is very like the sketch you have just shown me."

"Why, the thing is done," cried Daubrac. "We have only to confront this individual with the child whom Mériadec has taken in. He will recognise the man whom he has already recognised at the Morgue. The only question is to know where it shall be done—and you, sir, can manage that, since you are a member of the same club as he. Where does he live?"

"At the Hôtel Continental; but——"

"It was not there that Sacha went on arriving in Paris," said Mériadec. "He spoke to me of a large house where there was no one living."

"Perhaps this man has another house. But let me explain to you why I do not wish to appear in the matter. On leaving the club I saw the Marquis de Pancorbo—that is his name—I saw him get into a cab with a shabbily-dressed man. I took another cab and followed theirs, which stopped at the corner of the Rue Marbeuf. The Spaniard was no longer in it. He had seen me watching him on the Place de la Concorde, and he had walked in at one door of the cab and out at the other, leaving his companion inside."

"Well," interrupted Fabreguette, "we will go and search for him in the Rue Marbeuf."

"Allow me to finish," said the captain. "On my return home I found a letter from this man—a letter which he must have written at the club, after having pretended to get into the cab. This letter is an ultimatum. He states plainly that he saw also the lady who accompanied me, that he knows her, and that if I continue to watch him he will denounce her to her husband."

"A venomous rogue, upon my word!" cried the doctor; "we must deal with him ourselves."

"You will notice that he does not admit the crime."

"He will have to admit it, if the child recognises him."

"Perhaps; but he will do to me what he threatens—and a woman whom I love will be ruined."

"Why should he take vengeance on you, if you do not show yourself? He does not know that you have had relations with Mériadec——"

"And I shall take Sacha," said the baron. "You can rely upon it that your name will not be introduced, whatever happens."

Saint-Briac shook his head in sign of doubt, and said with emotion which he did not attempt to conceal:

"Gentlemen, I leave you to judge of my position—and I appeal also to this lady, since she has been good enough to listen to me, although it must have been painful to her, I am sure, to hear me talk of a woman who has forgotten her duty. Ought I, to punish an assassin, leave her to the vengeance of this wretch?"

"No," said Rose, in a firm voice.

"It is *esprit de corps* which puts this answer in your mouth," said the house-surgeon quickly. "Women always look at things from a sentimental point of view, and you forget that the duty of honest people is to further the ends of justice. What! Here is a villain who has killed his wife, deserted his child! We know it, it only rests with us to prove it, and we are silent. It would be shameful—I venture even to say it would be cowardly."

And as Saint-Briac grew pale, Daubrac continued:

"Even you, sir, feel that I am right. Certainly I can understand that you should hesitate, but I believe you exaggerate the danger to which you would expose the person in whom you are chiefly interested. I admit, if you like, that this man will denounce her to her husband. But there are two courses open to him; either he will write an anonymous letter, and the husband will take no heed of it; or else, on the contrary, he will sign his name, and the husband will see that this denunciation is only a manoeuvre invented by this rogue for the purpose of misleading justice, which will lay hands on him immediately he has been confronted with Sacha. And besides, Mériadec has just said, and I repeat it, that you will take no part in our proceedings against this so-called Spaniard. He knows well enough that it was not you who sheltered the child whom he abandoned, since you were arrested immediately after the crime, and it is the child who will take the principal part—led by one of us. You will not appear."

Saint-Briac, who was at the end of his arguments, hung his head, and after a pause he could find nothing better to say than to throw doubt on the efficacy of the confrontation.

"Are you quite certain, gentlemen," he asked timidly, "are you quite certain that this child will help you to convict his father?"

"It will be sufficient if he recognises the man who met him on his arrival in Paris, and who ascended the tower with him. We will do the rest."

"Does he know even that his mother has been murdered?"

"No," replied Mériadec, "I have not had the courage to tell him, and he did not see the body at the Morgue."

"So much the better!" cried Daubrac. "He will not refuse to identify the murderer when we point him out."

At this moment a door opened at the end of the room where the council was being held, and Sacha appeared.

No one present but Mériadec knew the child well: Fabreguette had not seen much of him; Rose Verdière had only caught a glimpse of him on the tower stairs; Daubrac and the captain had never seen him at all.

He was very pale, and the expression on his face showed plainly that he had heard all.

He went straight up to Mériadec and said to him:

"It is true, then? He has killed her?"

"I would have concealed it from you," murmured the baron, who was very much affected; "but since you know it——"

"I know that you accuse him; now, prove to me that he did it."

Mériadec did not answer. He did not feel that he had the courage to explain to this poor little fellow that the murderer could not be other than the man they had surprised in the Morgue the day before.

The doctor, much less weak than his friend, undertook to inform Sacha.

"My boy," said he firmly, "I know that you are very intelligent, and that you have as much courage as a man, so I can talk to you as I should if you were twenty years old. Your mother has been thrown from the top of the tower which she had ascended alone with your father, who disappeared immediately after the catastrophe which made you an orphan. He fled without troubling himself about you whom he had left at the bottom of the tower. Do not you think with us that he alone could have committed this abominable crime? He wished to rid himself at once of his wife and of his son——"

"I do not know that I am his son," interrupted the child.

"What do you say?" asked Daubrac eagerly.

"Paul Constantinowitch lived with us at Vérine, and I called him my father because my mother wished me to do so, but I did not love him—it was she who loved him—and our peasants detested him because he treated them harshly. When we came away to join him in Paris all her servants cried."

"And they did not tell you that they had another master before this man?"

"They did not dare, but I guessed it. Besides, I remember vaguely having seen, when I was very young, a gentleman who wore a handsome uniform, with large epaulettes, and who often took me in his arms. Often since then I have spoken of him to my mother. She always replied that I had dreamt it, and that my name was Alexander Paulowitch,"

"That is to say, the son of Paul, is it not?"

"Yes—in Russian."

"And the man who lived with your mother is called Paul?"

"Paul, son of Constantine."

"What a bad system they have in your country of only calling people by their Christian names. It's the very deuce to find them when one is looking for them. Fancy trying to obtain information about a Paul Constantinowitch in a country where there are thousands of them!"

"I wrote yesterday to Tambow," said Mériadec. "Sacha's mother was a countess; her residence was called Vérine. They will know out there what lady has lately left the country."

"And if you have no answer, we shall still be able to inquire at the embassy," replied the doctor; "but in the meantime we can act, and Sacha will not refuse to help us, for I am sure that he wishes to avenge his mother."

"How can I avenge her?" asked the child, with a *sang-froid* which astonished all present.

"By handing over her murderer to the French law; he will be condemned to death, and they will behead him."

"What am I to do to help?"

"Accompany that one of us who is going to seek him, and, when you are face to face with him, call him by his name of Paul, and ask him what he has done with the Countess Xenia," replied Mériadec. "We shall see what reply he makes."

"He will run away, as he run away yesterday when I saw him in that room where they expose the dead people."

"He will be caught, my boy," replied Fabreguette. "He will not always have a carriage and a good horse at hand."

"Very well. I am ready. Where shall we find him?"

"If I knew, I would take you there at once," said Mériadec. "We think that he lives under a strange name in one of the large hotels of Paris, and we are going to make certain that we are not mistaken."

"I should advise an inspection, too, of the houses in the Rue Marbeuf," added Daubrac, who had listened very attentively to the story of the captain's expedition. "Sacha would perhaps recognise the one where he was taken when he arrived in Paris."

"Yes, if I went into it. I should know the room where I slept, and the servant who waited on me, if he is there still. But I do not remember what the house is like outside. I only recollect that we approached it in a carriage by a large door, and that, in order to arrive there, you have to descend a badly-paved street. I went to sleep on the way, and the jolting awoke me."

"Then it is very probable that I am right. You must have passed the night in the Rue Marbeuf, and you breakfasted there, I suppose?"

"Yes, with mamma—Paul Constantinowitch had gone out early. We only had tea and eggs."

"You were waited upon by a servant?"

"Yes, by a man in livery, who was very ugly, and did not know his business. He broke two plates at breakfast, and mamma scolded him."

"In Russian?"

"No, he was a Frenchman."

Saint-Briac thought that this so-called footman might be the scamp who had come and called for Monsieur de Pancorbo at the club, and whom his master had dressed out in livery for the occasion. This man was probably his accomplice, his tool, and it was important to lay hands on him; but Saint-Briac had not examined him with sufficient attention to know him again, especially in other clothes.

"Tell me, my dear Sacha," said Daubrac, "when you went out after breakfast, to go to Notre-Dame, did you go down a broad avenue planted with trees?"

"Yes, and afterwards we crossed an open space where there was a fountain and some statues. After that, we walked along a quay, and the river was on our right."

"Good! we have it now," said Fabreguette. "The youngster came from the Rue Marbeuf, and I answer for it that I will find the house in which he passed the night."

Sacha looked askance at the painter, whose familiarities were distasteful to him, and began at once to question Mériadec, who had not yet taken much part in the discussion.

"You have not told me who this lady and gentleman are," said he, looking at Rose Verdère and Saint-Briac.

"You have already seen this young lady on the stairs at the tower," said Mériadec, quite surprised to hear his young protégée talk like a well-bred man who has come into a room full of strangers without being introduced to them.

"True—I remember now."

"And now you will see her every day. She is going to live here. She will occupy a room close to yours."

"Oh! how nice!" cried the child. "I shall have no more to do with that old servant with the wrinkled face. Will you let me kiss you, mademoiselle?"

Rose, touched and charmed, took him in her arms and kissed his forehead, saying sweetly:

"I will do my best to fill your mother's place."

"My mother? You are not like her at all. She had a harsh look, and your eyes are very gentle. I am sure you will not scold me, as she was always doing, and you will love me."

"Oh, yes! I will love you with all my heart," said Rose eagerly. "How could I help loving you? I, too, am alone in the world. I have no mother, and my poor father is dying."

"You have still friends," said Mériadec.

"We are going to make up a family for you," said Fabreguette, laughing. "Four brothers and one son; that's all."

"And your father will recover," added the doctor. "But let us talk of business. Monsieur Sacha consents to help us. That's a great point. It remains to decide how we shall proceed."

"Before all," replied Fabreguette, who still held to his idea, "we must find the house in the Rue Marbeuf. From to-day I can go and stroll about there with the little one."

"I will not go with you," said Sacha resolutely.

"Why so, young man?"

"The child is not wrong to refuse to accompany you, for he would run the greatest risk," said Daubrac. "The man whom we are looking for knows you by sight, since you ran after him when you came out of the Morgue."

"He knows me as well," said Mériadec.

"It is for that reason that neither you nor Fabreguette ought to show yourselves in the Rue Marbeuf. If he met you there, he would easily guess what your purpose was, and would adopt measures to foil you. Monsieur de Saint-Briac has the best of reasons for holding aloof. Thus, there only remains myself who can undertake this work satisfactorily."

"Or I," said Rose Verdière timidly.

"You!" cried Mériadec. "You forget that there are dangers to be run. This man is capable of anything. If he perceived that you were watching him——"

"He will not suspect a woman, whilst Monsieur Daubrac would perhaps be risking his life."

"My life is at your service," said the doctor gaily; "but do not alarm yourself, I am able to defend myself and shall come to no harm. Our young friend will none of Fabreguette, but I suppose that he will consent to accompany me."

"Yes, if my little mother comes with us," replied Sacha, clinging to his dear Rose.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," interrupted Saint-Briac; "it seems to me that you do not take quite a right view of the situation, and I must ask you to allow me to remind you that, before all, we ought to make certain that the Spaniard of whom I have told you and the man whom we seek are one and the same person. It is necessary, then, that the child should see this Spaniard, and he will not be able to see him in the Rue Marbeuf."

"Quite right," said Mériadec approvingly. "He does not live there, and the house where Sacha slept had doubtless been taken for one night."

"Monsieur de Pancorbo lives at the Hôtel Continental, in the Rue de Castiglione. He told me so, and I have no reason to doubt it. Further, he goes every day to the club at the entrance to the Avenue Gabrielle, at the corner of the Place de la Concorde. He goes there about five o'clock, and returns during the night, about twelve. Thus, nothing is easier than to await him at the door, and to take a good look at him as he passes. Sacha can do that, but this man must not see him."

"It will be sufficient to put the boy in a cab, which can stand opposite your club, but on the other side of the road," said Fabreguette. "Mademoiselle Rose can be there too, since he will not go without her. She must be careful to keep the windows up. It would be singular if the Spaniard noticed a child's face behind the glass."

"Good! and then?" asked the doctor.

"Then, if Sacha recognises him, we can go together to the magistrate, make a collective statement, and Paul Constantinowitch will be arrested immediately. The thing is perfectly simple. And as the scoundrel will only have to deal with us, he will not think of avenging himself by denouncing Monsieur de Saint-Briac's friend."

The captain shook his head. He was not so confident as Fabreguette; but, after having put himself forward as he had done, he could hardly draw back now.

Besides, he said to himself that Monsieur de Pancorbo would never know that he had informed Mériadec and his friends of him. He could not be aware of their existence, and he would never guess that he, Saint-Briac, had joined forces with them.

"I only ask one thing, gentlemen," said he, "which is, that you should not denounce him before having seen me. If you hand him over to justice, I shall have certain precautions to take to prevent the effect of anything he may say when he has no further need to be on his guard."

"Agreed," replied Fabreguette. "We will grant him a respite of four-and-twenty hours—another reason for wasting no more time. I hope mademoiselle is ready to start, and Sacha as well. This very day they must be at their post, in front of the club, at half-past four. We others will await them in the Champs-Élysées. As soon as their business is done they will rejoin us, and one of us will come and make his report to you. Where do you live?"

"No. 9, Avenue d'Antin."

"That is convenient. It is close to the Rond Point. What does Mademoiselle Verdière say to my plan?"

"I will do all that you gentlemen tell me," said Rose.

"And you, Signor Sacha?"

"I will go anywhere where my little mother likes to take me," replied the boy straightforwardly. "Only, if I see Paul Constantinowitch, I will not promise not to run up to him and spit in his face."

"The deuce! He is not for gentle means, the dear child," sneered Fabreguette. "If that is to be the case, it is not worth while troubling mademoiselle, for the whole plan would go to the dogs. Our man, once warned, would not fail to decamp from Paris."

"I am sure that if I spoke to him, Sacha would not do so," said Rose, looking at her young friend with her large soft eyes.

Sacha hesitated a moment, and then threw himself on her neck.

"No; I will not do it, as you forbid me," said he.

"Then," cried Fabreguette, "there is no reason why we should not try the experiment this evening."

"I do not object," said Saint-Briac; "but I think it would be better if mademoiselle brought Sacha back at once to Monsieur de Mériadec's, and I must ask you not to come to my house to-day; you would not find me at home. I shall be at home to-morrow afternoon, but your visit might be noticed—I should not be surprised if Monsieur de Pancorbo employed spies—and it is important for me that he should not discover that we are acting in common. It would be better, I think, that Monsieur de Mériadec should write and tell me what happens."

"And now, gentlemen, it only remains for me to take leave of you," concluded the captain, rising. "I know that I can rely on your loyalty, and I beg you to rely on my gratitude."

Three men's hands were extended to grasp his, and the clasp was cordial on the part of all; but Saint-Briac could not forget that Rose

Verdière was there, artlessly holding up her face to his. He imprinted a paternal kiss upon it, and was about to withdraw.

"And I, captain?" asked Sacha.

Saint-Briac kissed him tenderly and left the room, accompanied by Mériadec who escorted him as far as the courtyard.

He went his way, well pleased at having found brave hearts beating in unison with his own, and allies of whose devotion there was no doubt; but he could not help feeling uneasy as to the consequences of the secrets which he had been obliged to entrust to them.

His anxiety so absorbed him that on setting foot in the street he did not observe, seated on a post, a man who appeared to be watching the entrance to Mériadec's house.

V.

AFTER the captain's departure the sitting was concluded by common consent. The three musketeers had not much more to tell one another, since they had just adopted the plan of the campaign as proposed by their fresh ally.

It was agreed that Rose Verdière and Sacha should, before five o'clock, go and watch from a cab for the arrival of Monsieur de Pan-corbo at the club, or rather the arrival of Paul Constantinowitch, for they did not know the Spanish nobleman by sight.

Before the time arrived for them to start, Rose had to go and take possession of the room which Mériadec had placed at her disposal, and she had not yet quite made up her mind. She hesitated, in spite of Sacha's supplications and the insisting of the baron, in whom she now had, however, absolute confidence. It was Danbrac who overcame her reluctance. He spoke so well, he made so much of the advantages of this home, where she would be in perfect security, surrounded by sincere friends, that she yielded, after he had promised her that she should go to the Hospital every day to see her father.

She consented to go and inspect the apartments which the good Mériadec destined for her, and which consisted of two rooms, simply but comfortably furnished. They adjoined the room where Sacha slept, and in the main building, between the two wings, there was a large empty room, which could be turned into a work-room. It would only be necessary to take there a large table and some chairs, for the flower-maker's business does not demand complicated arrangements, and the baron declared that it should be done that day. Rose had but to go and fetch from her old home the box which contained her modest wardrobe, and the trifling articles which she used in making artificial flowers. This fitting once done—and it would not be a long matter—she would be able to set to work the next day.

The future plan of action was then arranged. It was agreed that every day at twelve o'clock, after luncheon, the two friends who did not live in the Rue Cassette should come and exchange with Mériadec and his guests news of the great enterprise in which they were all engaged.

Rose Verdière looked forward much to this daily meeting, and she begged the gentlemen to promise that they would never fail to appear;

but Fabreguette might have remained at home without her complaining of it, for the uproarious artist rather frightened her. It was Daubrac whom she wished to see as often as possible ; Daubrac, whose presence was as acceptable to her as Fabreguette's was indifferent.

These arrangements suited Mériadec too. The excellent man was charmed to see his house filled with movement and animation, the house in which he had so long lived in solitude. He would have liked to put them all up, including even the Bohemian, whom he had only known for the last two days. That was not possible, but he had the pleasure of sheltering the Angel of the chimes and the child.

He had a family now. He took a pleasure in forgetting that his happiness was only temporary, that it would come to an end at the same time as did the circumstances which had brought to him Rose and Sacha ; and, without avowing it to himself, he hoped that old Verdière would not recover too quickly, and that the campaign against the murderer would last for a long time.

His dream was to marry Rose and adopt Sacha : a chimerical dream, if you will. Although he had passed the age of illusions, Mériadec hoped to make himself beloved by dint of devotion ; and, in order to attain this object, he felt that he needed time, much time, for he did not flatter himself with having at first sight inspired a young girl of nineteen with a more tender feeling than that of sympathy and gratitude.

He did not think, either, of the fact that youth attracts youth, and that his friend Daubrac might become a dangerous rival. He only looked on the bright side of things, and did not ask himself whether his dear protégée and his comrade, the doctor, by meeting every day, would not end by falling in love with one another.

At the present moment Daubrac's only thought was to be off. He was very hungry, not having breakfasted, and was longing for a meal. The same must have been the case with Rose, but Mériadec was about to beg her to seat herself at the table, which his housekeeper had just prepared, and the doctor did not wish to be present at the first meal given by the baron to his new guests.

So he took his leave, after having promised the charming daughter of the keeper of the towers to visit her father in the Saint-André ward, to commend him to the especial attention of the surgeon in charge, and to bring the next day the authorisation which she required to visit the Hospital every day.

Mériadec did not seek to detain him, and Fabreguette, who would have liked to make the acquaintance of the baron's fare, did not dare to invite himself.

He took his departure with Daubrac, and, like the captain, they did not notice the man who was mounting guard in the Rue Cassette, and who had not moved since Saint-Briac went.

Daubrac had not yet formed a clear opinion on this singular artist whom he hardly yet knew, and he thought that Mériadec had admitted him to his intimacy a little too quickly ; but it was too late now to remedy an accomplished fact, and besides, Fabreguette was not altogether displeasing to him. Daubrac promised himself that he would study him, in order to find out his value and whether he could be safely trusted.

"I am going to breakfast," he said to him. "And you?"

"I—I should like to do the same," sighed the artist.

"What is there to prevent you?"

"The well has run dry," replied Fabreguette, slapping his empty pocket.

"Business is bad, then?"

"I have some orders. The woman at the cook-shop where I have my meals occasionally offered to let me paint her portrait; and I know, in the Rue de la Huchette, where I live, a pork-butcher who offered me thirty francs to decorate his shop. He wanted something symbolical—a boar's head with pig's feet crosswise, you know."

"Well?"

"Ah, there it is! I have no money to buy colours with. He certainly proposed to furnish me with models and to leave me them afterwards. I should have provisions for a week; but pork doesn't suit me—it's too heating."

"We will not eat any to-day," said the surgeon, laughing.

"You invite me, then?" cried Fabreguette.

"Certainly, we are partners now. The least I can do is to save you from starvation, and I can answer for it that you will find a plate laid for you every day at Mériadec's table. If he did not invite you to stay this morning, it was because he had two guests already, and had not provided for three. But I am here, and Duval's soup is not to be despised."

"The deuce! you need refuse yourself nothing. For my part, when I am in funds I have my meals at a tavern where, for eight sous, I have soup, meat, and a glass of beer. But, as you are well off, I will willingly let you treat me."

"Well off!—that's saying a good deal. I am not rolling in money. My mother allows me one hundred and fifty francs per month, and on days when I am on duty, the hospital furnishes me with healthy, and by no means abundant, food. But I can afford to treat myself from time to time, and I know on the Boulevard Saint-Michel an establishment where we shall do very well, and where I shall not ruin myself."

"At the corner of the Rue des Écoles? I have never dared to go in there. It is too dear for me."

"I am going to pay, I tell you."

"Then I accept—on condition that I pay next time," said the artist, putting on a dignified air which made Daubrac smile.

The good-hearted fellow was very much amused at Fabreguette's answers, and thought better of him for not disguising his misery. He began even to see that the artist, who had come down so low as to have to work for pork-butchers, was a well-meaning fellow, incapable of betraying those who treated him kindly. He was anxious to know how he had fallen so low, and as they walked towards the Boulevard Saint-Michel, by the Rue du Vieux-Colombier and the Place Saint-Sulpice, Daubrac began to question him on his past life.

Fabreguette did not require to be asked twice to relate his history from his birth. His mother was a young lady who had shone in the front rank among the stars of the gay world during the reign of Louis Philippe, and his father had judged it prudent to remain incognito.

The lady to whom he owed the light had had the idea at first of bringing him up like a boy in a good station of life. She had placed him at college, where he had remained four years, wearing out the seat of his breeches without learning anything but to draw caricatures of the professors and masters. Then poverty had come, with years, to this grasshopper who had gathered nothing whilst the warm weather lasted. The ladies of easy virtue of other days did not buy houses out of their savings, and this one, no longer having the money to pay for her son, was obliged to take him from school. She died soon after, so that, at the age of fifteen, the inheritor of her name found himself destitute. But the urchin had courage and 'cuteness. He had managed to introduce himself into the studio of a painter much in vogue at that time and very much forgotten now. He began by running errands for the pupils, cleaning the brushes, and preparing the palettes. In his spare time he drew, and as he showed some promise, the master gave him advice, by which he was not slow to profit.

He had very quickly begun to earn a little money by executing pastels, which he sold at a low price, and two or three wind-falls had enabled him to take, on the fifth floor of an old house in the Rue de la Huchette, an attic which he furnished with an iron bedstead, a mattress, and four rickety chairs.

This was his studio, and here he found means to receive, and even to lodge, his friends—poor wretches like himself, picked up in the streets or in the low restaurants which he frequented. He might, without much trouble, have led a more comfortable life, for he was gifted with an extraordinary aptitude for executing all sorts of well-paying work; engravings, lithographs ordered by the editors of illustrated books, water-colours representing short-skirted ladies, which certain dealers bought of him to expose in their windows as a bait for customers.

Unfortunately, in this manner he had become incapable of painting a real picture. He had got into the habit of only working to catch the popular eye, painting without a model, at random, by routine. He was clever, and his cleverness had ruined him, not to mention that he had no application, and that as soon as he had enough to live on for one day, he went off to boat at Asnières, or fish in the small arm of the Seine.

Finally he had come down to the lowest order of work. He painted panels for coffee rooms, the outsides of boxes for export, altar pieces for country churches, and even anatomical studies from nature.

He was none the less poor. He did not have a dinner every day, but his destitution had not clouded his unconquerable good spirits any more than it had hardened his heart. He laughed at his own misery, and he was always ready to share his bread, when he had it, with a Bohemian still more unfortunate than himself.

Daubrac was a man of a very different type. Daubrac belonged to a family in easy circumstances. Daubrac was a hard worker, and was bound eventually to make himself a name in his profession; his heart was set on it, for he was ambitious, and knew his own value. Thus, he had little sympathy with indolent waiters upon fortune. He even despised them. But he loved honest people, and as he listened

to Fabreguette's story, he saw that his apparent carelessness was animated only by good feeling. His was a mind without malice, and a loving nature—too loving, even—for he became readily attached to any stranger, and was not always fortunate in the object of his choice. With his assurance, his audacity, and his inventive faculty, he had all that was necessary to serve usefully the cause of Paul Constantinowitch's victims. He asked nothing better than to be made use of, and after this long retrospective chat, the doctor, fully edified, thought that Mériadec would never repent of having accepted the co-operation of this unoccupied artist.

The story of Jean Fabreguette's life was concluded just at the moment when they arrived on the Boulevard Saint-Michel, at the door of a restaurant much frequented by students. It was past mid-day, and these gentlemen had almost all finished breakfast. They had repaired to the neighbouring cafés, and only a few lingerers were left.

"So much the better," said Daubrac, "I like to have free play for my arms, and I can't eat at my ease when my plate is jammed up against my neighbour's."

"Not to mention that the said neighbour can hear all that you say," added Fabreguette.

"And, as a matter of fact, we have to talk about our grand business. But we sha'n't be interrupted. I can see an empty table over there at the other end of the room. Come along."

They entered without looking behind them, and consequently without noticing that a man was following them closely—a man whom they had not remarked in the Rue Cassette, and who had been watching them for the last twenty minutes.

They took their places at a table which the doctor had chosen beforehand, and one of the little waitresses whom a popular song has celebrated came to take their orders.

Daubrac did the thing well. He ordered two bottles of Bordeaux from the list, and three expensive dishes—an omelette *aux rognons*, fillet of beef and new potatoes, and peas *au sucre*.

It was long since the artist had partaken of such a feast, and he cried out against the luxury of the fare. But his companion reassured him.

"I have just received my quarter's allowance," said he gaily, "and I am delighted to start on it with you."

"You are lucky to have quarters," sighed Fabreguette; "all my months are alike."

"Times will change, my dear fellow. I will get some orders for you. I don't often go into the society of rich people, but I have some acquaintances amongst them. But before I unearth a millionaire who will order his full-length portrait of you, let us talk about the campaign which we have just opened. Mériadec has no doubts on the subject; he thinks we are going to lay hands immediately on this rascal who changes his name as he changes his shirt, but I think he will have to alter his opinion. And the plan which the council adopted seems to me to have several weak spots."

"Hush!" interrupted Fabreguette; "there's some one coming."

A man had just entered the room, and after having hesitated about

seating himself at several empty tables, he had chosen one which was not far from where the two friends sat.

"Hang it!" muttered Daubrac. "He will be in our way. Shall we change our places?"

The new comer was talking to the waitress, but he was expressing himself by signs. He pointed with his finger to a dish on the card which she handed to him, and when she asked him if he would take some wine, he replied:

"I can't hear. Speak louder. I am deaf."

This man had a grey beard, and was bent with age and poorly clad. With his peaked cap and large blue spectacles he looked like an old clerk who had been superannuated by reason of his infirmity. He looked peevish, too, like all bureaucrats who have passed thirty years of their life on a leather stool.

The little waitress did not hurry herself to serve him, and seemed inclined to poke fun at him, for she was making faces behind his back.

"I asked you if you wanted any wine?" she cried at the top of her voice.

"Bread!" replied the old man. "Yes, two sous' worth. And let the soup be good. For dessert I will have three sous' worth of cheese. Make haste, my girl; I am in a great hurry."

"All right, old curmudgeon!"

This impudent reply made Fabreguette laugh, but the man did not take any notice, doubtless because he had not heard a word.

"He's certainly as deaf as a post," said the artist loudly, looking at him from the corners of his eyes.

The man took a paper from his pocket and began to read, without troubling himself about his neighbours.

"Do you think it's a dodge?" murmured Daubrac, who was mistrustful of this total deafness.

Fabreguette understood, and made a sign to his companion, the meaning of which was evidently, "We will make certain of it; I will put him to the proof."

He had formerly seen, when passing before the army examiners, cases of sham deafness which the major discovered by setting a very simple trap which was almost always successful. "Go along, my lad, you are exempted," he would say in a low voice. And the simple conscript went.

"So," said Fabreguette, without shouting, but speaking very distinctly, "you think that old fellow is a police spy?" At the same moment he examined the old man's face, which remained as impassible as a block of wood.

The waitress had just brought him what he had ordered, and he was crumbling his bread into his soup, without raising his eyes, which he kept obstinately fixed on his paper, and without interrupting for a single instant the perusal of that interesting sheet.

"My mind is easy now," said the artist. "We can talk about our affairs as unreservedly as if we were in the middle of the Champ de Mars."

"Let us taste this omelette first," said Daubrac, who still had his doubts.

"Exquisite!" cried Fabreguette. "One doesn't taste such as this at Mother Cordapuis's. I put up with hers because she gives me credit up to three meals. But since yesterday that is unfortunately not the case, and if you had not invited me, my breakfast would have been an imaginary one. For which reason, my dear fellow, I am entirely at your disposal. I have a grateful stomach."

"You must thank my friend Mériadec, and obey his instructions. He is the chief of our band, and I am only a cipher. And I must confess to you, between ourselves, that I don't quite understand why he can't leave it to the magistrate to capture this scoundrel."

"Because he wishes to save the captain."

"The captain? There's a man who doesn't seem to me to know his own mind. If I were in his place, I should not beat up for auxiliaries to rid myself of my foe. I should do the job myself."

"He is afraid for his mistress's sake."

"And he prefers that we should take the chestnuts out of the fire. I don't object to that, but our plan appears to me to be badly conceived. When the young Muscovite has recognised his mother's murderer in the person of the so-called Spaniard, we shall not be much further advanced, if we have to keep this discovery to ourselves."

"The fact is, that we must sooner or later denounce this pretended Marquis de Pancorbo—funny name, isn't it? If we denounce him, he will meet it with a denial. We have no proof against him, after all. The evidence of a child of nine will not be sufficient for the magistrate to issue a warrant for the arrest of a man of rank. So, whatever Monsieur Mériadec may say, I am going to take a turn round the Rue Marbeuf, and I have an idea that I shall obtain some valuable information there."

"Not so loud!" said Daubrac in an undertone, as he stole a glance at their neighbour, who was finishing his soup, and was seemingly quite absorbed in the operation.

"Oh, there's no danger of his hearing us," said Fabreguette, shrugging his shoulders. "And, to resume, you must know that I am intimately acquainted with that neighbourhood. I worked there at a coach-builder's, who had given me some crests to paint on a carriage, and I'll bet you who like that I shall find Sacha's house the first time. I'll even bet that I'll enter it."

"If it isn't deserted. But, talking about Sacha, what do you think of this child who has so quickly gained all our worthy Mériadec's sympathy?"

"I think he is very forward for his age."

"Yes, he's not wanting in intelligence, but he is not over-burdened with sensibility. His eyes remain dry when his mother is spoken of. He knows now that the unfortunate woman is exposed at the Morgue. I can understand that he has not asked to see her, but he is not even anxious to know what will be done with her body. He only thinks of taking vengeance on his father."

"His father? no—he repudiates him. He says plainly that Paul Constantinowitch took the place of a gentleman with big epaulettes. It is as if he said that this Paul was only the countess's lover."

"Perhaps he doesn't intend to be spiteful. But I doubt this precocious urchin's sincerity."

"Precocious enough, indeed, for one could swear that he has fallen in love with the keeper's daughter. He hasn't got bad taste, this Russian youngster. She is as pretty as the day is long, and no one will persuade me that she hasn't a weakness for you."

"I don't think that, but I am pretty certain that Mériadec has one for her, and I'm not sorry for it. She is a good girl, and if he ended by marrying her I don't think I should disapprove of it."

"But I'm certain she would not have him."

"That's something like wine!" said Fabreguette, after having emptied his glass at one draught. "It gives one courage, and I feel like doing by myself the work of three of us. I am like the English soldiers, who fight best on a full stomach; and I am going to profit by the opportunity, and march on the enemy immediately. Where shall you go on leaving here?"

"To the Hospital. I must be there to do my rounds; and besides, I want to have a look at old Verdière, to see whether he will pull through. I'm afraid not."

"And I'm off to the Rue Marbeuf."

"Go, my dear fellow, but be careful. One false step would spoil all."

"Don't fear. I shall keep my eyes open. Ah! there's the old fellow going. His breakfast hasn't cost him much."

Their neighbour, in fact, had just pushed eleven sous towards the waitress, and was walking towards the door, bill in hand.

"Didn't I tell you he was paying no attention to us?" said Fabreguette. "If he had been a spy, he would have stopped here to watch us. Besides, he is certainly as deaf as a post, and did not hear a word of what we said. Here's your health."

"Here's yours, and good luck," replied Daubrac, who did not share all his friend's illusions.

The breakfast was concluded without incident. Fabreguette would have liked to consummate it by going outside and having some coffee and two or three drinks; but Daubrac did not care about doing the round of the cafés with his new friend, and he had it served on the table where they had just breakfasted.

The artist emptied a measure of brandy, the surgeon paid the bill, and they left the place together.

The Boulevard Saint-Michel was very animated, as it always is when the students are smoking their pipes and drinking their beer outside the cafés. But the old deaf man who had made Daubrac feel uneasy for a moment had not remained in the neighbourhood, and if he had not stopped anywhere since he left, must already have been far away.

Fabreguette proposed to accompany the doctor as far as the Hospital, but the doctor refused. He was in a hurry to get home, and he had nothing more to say to the artist, whom he had had ample time to study and now knew thoroughly. He was loth, however, to leave him without a sou in his pocket, and offered him, as a loan, a five-franc piece, which was accepted without ceremony.

The artist, left alone, hastened to change it to buy some sou cigars ; lit one, and walked with deliberate step towards the Champs-Élysées, by way of the quays on the right bank of the river.

Never for a long time past had he felt so disposed or so well prepared to brave the most perilous adventures. All the boyars of Russia and all the marquises of Spain would have had no terrors for him.

He had, besides, every quality necessary for the successful carrying out of such an enterprise : brazen assurance, a ready tongue, and a special talent for extracting information out of people whom he accosted in the street or in front of shops. A Parisian born, he had a most intimate knowledge, even to its most hidden recesses, of the Paris which he had never left, and his well-tryed habit of having to make shift for a living had made him as artful as an old African campaigner.

It was an amusement for him to act the detective, to roam about the town, to mount guard in front of a house, to scan the passers-by. It was his ordinary occupation, when orders did not come in, and when he had had enough of fishing. And upon this occasion he was about to play the game under much better conditions than usual, since he had a hundred sous in his pocket. One hundred sous ! enough to pay for several absinthes at a wine-shop, and even to invite some man to drink with him, and thus extract from him, thanks to this act of politeness, the information which he sought.

Thus, he had no doubts of success, and was triumphant in advance. He already imagined himself "fetching," as he called it, Daubrac, Mériadec, Rose Verdière, and even the captain, by telling them how he had discovered, at the first attempt, the house where Sacha had slept.

He thought to himself that this house must be one of those large, deserted buildings, such as are seen in certain neighbourhoods, where speculators ruin themselves in building houses which never let. And his was not a bad idea either, for the foreigner who had got rid of his wife and child might very well have taken such an empty house for a few days and furnished it hastily.

He trusted to his acuteness to recognise it amongst many others, and to his cunning to obtain an entry into it.

Fabreguette, with his long legs, did not occupy much time in arriving at the Place de la Concorde, and he began to walk up the grand avenue of the Champs-Élysées, where, a few hours later, his red cap and his awkward figure would have created a sensation. But he met no one in the path which he turned into but some early-rising Englishwomen, and there was no one in the roadway but some grooms exercising their masters' horses. The cavaliers who ride in the Bois before breakfast had gone home, and it was too early for the fine ladies who appear there in their brilliant turn-outs before dinner. He walked along, then, unnoticed, and, by looking round from time to time, he was able to make certain that no one was following him.

At the corner of the Rue Marbeuf he threw away his cigar, which was nearly finished, and replaced it by his pipe, in order to give himself more the air of a house-painter in search of a job.

The coach-builder's shop for whom he had formerly worked was at the beginning of the street, and he espied on the threshold a foreman

whom he knew and who by chance recognised him. Here was an opportunity for a chat, and Fabreguette did not fail to take advantage of it. He accosted the man, and asked him whether he had not some work to give him. The reply was in the negative. They had had recourse to him at a busy time, but they had their own crest-painters, and only occasionally employed odd hands.

Upon this Fabreguette began to tell him how, art having sunk very low, he found himself reduced to painting signs and ceilings.

"I don't find any fault with the work," said he, "and I'm ready to do anything to gain an honest living. You don't happen to know about here any one who would care to have his portrait done in oil or crayons? I can guarantee a likeness."

"No," replied the foreman shortly. "They prefer to be photographed."

"Oh, those collaborators with the sun!" cried Fabreguette, lifting his eyes towards the sky, "they take the bread out of the mouths of us artists. But times are so hard that I would be glad to compete with them, if I had only enough money to buy a camera and some collodion."

"Wait a minute!" said the kind-hearted man, whom he had been lucky enough to accost; "you say you can paint on walls as well?"

"Certainly. I have no equal at it. Last year I executed a fresco in the billiard-room of a tavern at Belleville. They came to see it from Pantou, from Aubervilliers, from Bondy, from——"

"There's no question of anything like that. At the end of the street, right at the bottom of the hill, there's an old house where no one has lived for ten years. The landlord has let it at last, a few days ago, to some eccentric character who is seemingly going to occupy it. He must be cracked, for the house is at the bottom of a hole. One might as well live in a cellar. But that's his business. He has sent in his furniture already, and they say he's going to do it up like new, before he comes to live in it. Possibly there will be some decorators' work there. Go and have a look."

"I could wish for nothing better, but shall I find any one to speak to?"

"Oh, yes. The tenant's footman sleeps there every night, and he is there at the present time, for I saw him pass here half an hour ago. Profit by the opportunity, and go and offer your services."

"That's very good advice. I'm off now. Thanks, old fellow, and *au revoir*! You will have a drink with me as I return if the thing is arranged?"

"I sha'n't refuse. The crib is just past the turning on the left. It has a large carriage entrance, and instead of a bell there is a big knocker."

"I shall find it, no fear," said Fabreguette, who began immediately to descend the steep incline of the Rue Marbeuf.

At the bottom of this hill the road takes a turn, and when he had passed the corner of a long wall which forms one side, he saw, twenty paces in front of him, the house in question, massively built, and closed like a fortress. All the shutters were fastened, and nothing indicated that it was inhabited.

"That's it," said Fabreguette to himself, "it has a kind of a 'Tour de Nesle' look which tempts me to risk the adventure."

Without further deliberation Fabreguette, who had taken up a position on the other side of the street to examine the front, crossed the road, grasped the knocker and plied it vigorously.

The blows awoke prolonged echoes. The house sounded hollow, like an empty barrel.

No one stirred at this thundering appeal, and Fabreguette knocked again more loudly, but without success.

"It's certainly the castle of the Sleeping Beauty—unless the man didn't come in. And yet the foreman told me he had seen him pass."

A slight sound caused him to raise his head. A shutter had just been opened at one of the windows on the first floor, and at the end of a moment a voice from above called out :

"Wait a minute ; I'm coming down."

"Good !" thought Fabreguette, "he wants to see who it is before he opens the door. I've found the bird at home. My man would not take such good care of himself if he had nothing to conceal. I have him. It's a case of playing a careful game now."

A minute afterwards he heard heavy steps approaching, then the key turned in the lock, and a singular face appeared between the wall and the half-opened door, the clean-shaven face of a tall fellow, lean and straight as a poplar, with a white tie, and clothed in black from head to foot ; the air and appearance of a footman in a grand family.

"What do you want ?" asked this individual abruptly, without quitting his suspicious attitude.

"I beg pardon for troubling you," replied Fabreguette, carrying his hand to his cap. "I'm a decorator, and a friend of mine in this neighbourhood has just told me that there was some work to do here."

"Work ? That depends. Could you paint four large panels in a dining-room ?"

"I should think so ! that's just my speciality, and I know what you want—some well-chosen hunting scenes ; on the right, a battue, with the shooters in a line in the foreground and the beaters at the back ; on the left, the death—of the stag or wild boar, as you choose. I have no equal in this line, and, if you like, I'll paint the master's portrait doing the honours to his wife, or mistress—just as you please."

The man in black received this torrent of words without flinching, and replied :

"You seem to understand your business. It remains to know what are the terms upon which you would undertake the work. If they are acceptable, we might come to an understanding, but I can't conclude any agreement without first consulting my master, and I warn you that he will probably only take you on trial at first."

"That will suit me ; but, before telling you what this work will cost him, I must see the place. You can understand that if the panels are five yards by two, for instance, it would be more expensive than filling in the space over a chimney piece."

"Naturally," said the man, smiling. "Well, I can show it to you. You can take the measurements, and then you can make an estimate, which I will submit to the marquis to-morrow."

"Then, the marquis is not here ?"

"No. The house is not yet completely furnished, and he will not

occupy it until it is quite ready for him. But there is no need for you to see him. I am his steward, and he has given me *carte blanche*, as far as the internal arrangements are concerned."

As he spoke the major-domo was gradually widening the opening of the door, and he had finally thrown it wide open.

Fabreguette could see his whole figure now, and was able to examine his face closely, as he stood with the light falling on it.

He noted, first of all, the coachbuilder had not lied when he said that the footman was very ugly. The man had the typical criminal's head: hair cut low over his forehead, eyes deeply sunk in their orbits and half-hidden beneath bushy eyebrows; high cheekbones, flat nose, enormous jawbones and blobber lips. He had a vague resemblance to a bull-dog. His face wore an expression of treachery and astuteness which completed a repulsive whole.

"What a mug!" thought Fabreguette. "His very looks would condemn him. And if this fellow didn't have a hand in the Notre-Dame affair, I'll allow Mériadee and the others to call me a fool."

"I've no time to waste here," said the cross-grained steward in a harsh voice. "Come in, if you want to see the dining room. If not, off you go, and don't come here again."

The door which he still kept hold of was about to be shut in Fabreguette's face, and Fabreguette, being far from wishing to halt at the beginning of an affair which had opened so well, hastened to cross the threshold of the suspicious-looking house.

The steward let him pass, double-locked the door and drew two large bolts.

"You're afraid I shall escape, then?" said Fabreguette, with a rather forced laugh.

"It's not that, but I don't want to be disturbed, and you've no idea of the cheek of the neighbours. If I allowed them, they would walk in here as if it was open to the public. They probably think there's some mystery about the place. They will get over that idea when my master has taken up his quarters here with his carriages and servants; but, in the meantime, I won't have any one come in without my leave; like two urchins did that I found playing marbles in the entrance hall, one day when I had forgotten to lock the street door."

It was very gloomy in this hall, and Fabreguette could barely distinguish at the other end a staircase which was supposed to be lighted from above.

"I'll go first," said the steward; "you have only to follow me. The dining-room which I am going to show you is on the first floor."

Fabreguette followed him, and noticed that the top of the staircase was surmounted by a glass roof, about twenty yards above the first floor. This arrangement, which is an unusual one in private houses, reminded him of the stairs of Notre-Dame, which at least were lit up in places by loop-holes.

Then he began to think that this house had the appearance of a mouse-trap. He had got in easily, and he could not get out without the permission of the keeper, who appeared to him to be more vigilant and less accommodating than the Angel of the chimes' father.

But the artist of the Rue de la Huchette had a great deal too much

conceit to allow, even to himself, that he had just committed an imprudent act. He was just congratulating himself on having so adroitly lulled the suspicions of the liveried Cerberus, and was thinking:

"If, as I have no doubt, this ugly beggar is the servant and accomplice of the Spaniard of whom the captain told us, he must be more foolish than ugly, for he swallowed a story which would not deceive a child. If he had any wits, he would fight shy of a painter who came to look for work at the far end of the Rue Marbeuf, where no one ever passes, and who goes and knocks at the door of an hermetically-closed house. Now I am certain to 'do' him, and his scamp of a master will soon be captured. It will teach him to employ a fool like this."

This was certainly a hasty judgment on Fabreguette's part, and the bigger fool on this occasion was not the one whom he imagined.

The man in black stopped on the landing of the first floor, which was still darker than the stairs, opened a door, and stood aside to allow Fabreguette to pass. In the middle of the room which he motioned to him to enter were burning two candles in silver candlesticks standing upon a table. Without this light the darkness would have been complete, for all the windows were closed by shutters, and the painter could not refrain from saying to his guide:

"The light hurts your eyes, then, that you turn day into night?"

"It's not that," replied the steward, "but I'm only here for a short time to-day. My master sent me to look for a cigar-case which he left in his bedroom, and I didn't want to have the trouble of opening the shutters for a quarter of an hour. I am going when you have seen what I am about to show you. That's as much as saying you were lucky to find me here."

"You don't live in this house, then?"

"Not yet, but I come here every day, and I shall be here whilst you are at work. You will probably see the marquis as well, for he will no doubt appreciate your efforts. He pays well, and he expects to be well treated."

"He is right. I should do the same if I were rich."

"No one is as rich as the marquis. It can well be said of him that he does not know what he is worth. But he likes to see that things are properly done, and he knows their value."

"He's a foreigner, eh? Frenchmen don't throw their money about, when they have any."

"The marquis is a grandee of Spain."

"Grandee of Spain! I don't exactly know what that is, but it sounds well. And he's going to live in Paris?"

"Possibly. He travels a great deal, and when he likes a country he settles himself there as if he was going to stop ten years. Come, and I will show you the dining-room."

Fabreguette saw at a glance that the room he was in was nearly empty. A table of imitation *boule* and two or three brackets on the wall between the two windows formed the whole of the furniture.

The Spaniard had deemed it superfluous to furnish it any more to receive guests who were only to pass one night under his roof.

The steward, candle in hand, showed the artist into a bedroom, or at least there was a bed and a few easy chairs—a bed with columns and a canopy in the Louis XIII style, which looked as if it had been picked up at a sale-room, and some tapestried chairs from the same source.

The bed had been slept in, and no one had taken the trouble to make it again. The clothes were hanging on the ground, and the tumbled pillows bore the marks of two heads which had lain on them.

Fabreguette, who noticed everything, did not fail to conclude from this that the unfortunate countess had passed the night in this room with her so-called husband.

"Certainly," he said to himself, "this idiot of a man has no suspicions of me, for if he imagined what I have come here for, he would not show me all this.

The artist was about to be still more astonished.

On leaving the bedroom, they went through a dressing-room, where he saw a dressing-table and a little iron bedstead—a child's bedstead.

"They put Sacha to bed here," thought Fabreguette.

Beyond the dressing-room was a room furnished with six chairs and a round table, on which were to be seen the remains of a breakfast.

This neglect to clear away the things afforded abundant proof that the house had been abandoned by its master on the day after the countess's arrival, and that the steward had not set foot there since, although he stated the contrary. Now or never was the time to make him talk, so as to commit himself still more.

"Your grandee of Spain has had something to eat here, then?" he asked, without seeming to attach the least importance to the question which he put negligently.

"He!" cried the steward. "The marquis take his meals on a waxed cloth, out of common porcelain! It's easy to see you don't know him. Take notice, my friend, that my master lives everywhere like the great nobleman that he is. Without counting his palace at Madrid, he has, in his own country, seven castles——"

"In Spain," said Fabreguette, who could not resist the temptation to make a joke.

"You're funny," said the man in black, knitting his brows. "That doesn't go down here, my lad. The marquis's seven castles are more ancient and more massive than the Louvre. He keeps numerous servants in them, and, in each of the seven, the table is laid every day in the year, and dinner prepared for twelve people."

"Oh!" said the painter of the Rue de la Huchette, in admiration. "Seven dinners! It's royal! But the marquis can't be everywhere at once. Who eats them?"

"His servants."

"The deuce! They have good situations. Their life would suit me well. It must pass pleasantly. You've had a taste of it, eh?"

"I am their chief, and I never leave the marquis. He has honoured me by attaching me to his person, and I accompany him everywhere. I have travelled through Europe with him."

"It must be jolly to travel! It is my dream; and to think I've never been further than Versailles!—I, who should so much like to go to Italy, Russia—there are some rich men in those countries—in Russia,

especially, they are all princes, and they patronise artists. I am sure I should make my fortune there."

"You're not fastidious," sneered the steward. "But, between ourselves, I don't think the marquis feels disposed to pay your expenses. And to return to this breakfast of which you see the remains, you're not very clever if you haven't guessed that I ate it."

"You did not eat it all yourself; there are three places," interrupted Fabreguette, who could not keep his tongue quiet.

"I say, do you know you're too inquisitive? I don't care for workmen who interfere in what doesn't concern them."

"I beg pardon, I was wrong, and will ask you nothing more—except to show me the panels. I must measure them before I fix a price. Are they here?"

"What! in this ante-room? What are you thinking of, my dear fellow? This is the room where the footmen will wait when the marquis's house is arranged. I breakfasted here the other day with my wife and son, who came to see my master's new house, and who stayed here a day and a night; but that is no reason for confusing this hole with the grand dining-room. You see the tapestry is not hung yet, and there are only four bare walls. The dining-room is behind this partition, and we are now going into it."

The steward pressed a spring hidden in the woodwork, which at once slid along in a groove and disclosed a narrow hole.

"It's a plan I invented to facilitate the servants' work. We are going in by the back entrance. Walk on first, there is not room for two at once. It is dark in there, but I will show you a light."

Fabreguette entered unsuspectingly, and hardly had he set foot in the so-called dining-room, than the partition closed over him again with a crash.

Fabreguette found himself all at once in profound darkness, but his first thought was that the mechanism which closed the panel had acted of its own accord, and that the steward, whom he took for a vain idiot, was not the cause of the accident.

"Your invention is very ingenious" he cried, "but the springs work too easily. Your moveable woodwork only missed cutting me in two by the breadth of a hair."

The man in black made no answer to this first appeal, and Fabreguette, already rather uneasy, began to knock with his fist against the partition, which was evidently very thick, for it gave back a dead sound and did not vibrate beneath his vigorous and repeated blows.

The poor artist listened, but heard nothing.

Of a truth the adventure was turning out badly, and the imprudent Fabreguette began to recover from his illusions. The scales fell from his eyes, and he asked himself how he could have fallen into such a clumsily-set trap, for the readiness with which the man had received him into the house ought to have made him suspicious from the very first.

Now it was too late, and it was necessary to devise some means of freeing himself from the threatening position in which he found himself. He waited a short time longer, in the vague hope that the man had

gone to fetch some instrument with which to open this automatic door. But this idea did not last long, and he had to resign himself to the fact that he was purely and simply in prison, at the mercy of a rogue. And what a prison! a black hole, where the air did not penetrate any more than the light, a veritable box in which he was shut up like a rat in a trap.

He began to make the round of it, feeling his way along the partition, and after having found out by touch four corners forming right angles, he came to the conclusion that the room was square, and not large enough ever to have been used as a dining-room. It was more probably one of those hiding-places intended to conceal an outlaw, such as existed in large quantities at the time of the first revolution. But a room habitable for a refugee outlaw, with a friend to feed him, was not so for Fabreguette, fallen into the grip of a murderer's satellite. He ran a great risk of dying of hunger or suffocation, and he could find no means of making his escape. He groped about in every direction without discovering even the semblance of an opening. The partitions gave him no hope, and he had no instrument which might have served to pierce the boards whose thickness would have resisted the blows of an axe.

The floor on which he walked was destined to serve him for a bed, for the pitch dark room contained not a single article of furniture.

When he had made up his mind as to the fate which awaited him, Fabreguette did not fall into a fit of despair, but into one of violent rage against himself. He cursed his presumption and blindness, and bitterly reproached himself for having thrown himself into the wolf's mouth, instead of confining himself to a conversation at the door. Five minutes would have been sufficient to edify himself as to the inhabitants of this cut-throat den.

When he had in some degree regained his presence of mind, he asked himself how the pretended marquis's accomplice could have smelt out an enemy in the person of a painter in search of work. Fabreguette did not recollect ever having seen the bestial face of this man, and he could not find any explanation for this trap. Did he who prepared it know that he was coming? Did he know him? And, if he knew him, how had he known that he would present himself on a certain day at the door of the house in the Rue Marbeuf? All this was incomprehensible, and the artist, by dint of reflection, ended by losing the thread of his ideas. The facts became a tangled mass in his head, and he was afraid that he would lose his senses.

He had arrived at this point when a sudden noise attracted his attention. Almost immediately a ray of light penetrated his prison. Dazzled at first by this sudden transition from gloom to brightness, he opened his eyes and, through a square hole which had suddenly appeared in the partition, he saw the grim face of the old man who had breakfasted at the table near his own in the restaurant on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. This odious old man was looking at him over the top of his blue spectacles, and chuckling in his grizzled beard. He held in his hand the silver candlestick which the steward had carried just before, and he held it so as to throw the light on his shrivelled face.

Fabreguette thought he was in a dream, and pinched himself to make sure that he was awake. The old man's voice soon brought him back into the world of reality.

"Well, my lad," said this scoffing voice, "you wanted to put me in a hole, and you've got there yourself! That's the result of coming and playing the detective. You started on some one cleverer than yourself, and you've got the worst of it. Ah! ah! you're beginning to see I can alter myself at will. It's rather late in the day. You should have recognised me when I opened the street door. You might have escaped."

"Then, it was you who——"

"It was I who was sitting not far from you and your friend at the restaurant where you had breakfast. I had followed you from the Rue Cassette, and I heard all you said at the restaurant, for I'm no more deaf than you are. It's an old dodge, but it always succeeds when you know how to go to work. The proof is that you were not afraid to discuss your business before me. When I knew where you were going, I was off without more ado, I took a cab, and I arrived here three quarters of an hour before you. I had plenty of time to get myself up as a footman, and if you see me now dressed like a poor old man again, it is only because I want to prove to you what a fool you are. Capital joke! Ha! ha! ha!"

Fabreguette felt little inclined to laugh. He would have liked to have sprung at the wretch's throat, but he would hardly have been able to get his hand through the hole, and the rascal took good care to keep beyond his reach.

"All right," said the prisoner, in a voice choked with passion, "I have let myself be caught, and it is clear I can't get out of here unless you let me out. But I am no wiser as to what you intend to do with me."

"You have some kind of idea on the subject."

"Not the least, or I should not ask you."

"Well, you're in the mouse-trap. I'm going to leave you there."

"Until I die of hunger?"

"Certainly. That won't be long—unless you have brought something to eat with you."

"What will you gain by my death?"

"In the first place, I shall have the pleasure of ridding myself of a spy. And then you form one of a band of good folks whom I propose to exterminate to the last one, just to prevent them from poking their noses into our business."

"I don't understand," said Fabreguette, who understood only too well.

"Don't play the fool. You know well enough what I mean. You and a few other idiots have taken it into your heads to annoy a man who did not bother himself about you, for he did not even know of your existence. You simply proposed to send him to the guillotine; he has every right to stick up for himself, and it will cost you dear for having attacked him. But it is not against you that he has the greatest spite; and, if you so choose, you can get yourself out of the scrape into which you have foolishly put yourself."

"Are you proposing a bargain to me?"

"I have no authority to do so, but I might take upon myself to release you, if——"

"What must I do?"

"Oh! next to nothing. You would have to help me to obtain possession of the child."

"The child?" stammered Fabreguette. "What child?"

"At it again!" cried the old brute. "Understand once for all that I know you all, and I know your plans, too. Do you want a proof of it? You have only to listen to what I am going to tell you. You are five, of whom one is a woman. There is, firstly, a great lout who calls himself the Baron de Mériadec. It was he who found the little boy at the foot of the south tower, and took him home with him to the Rue Cassette. There is the daughter of the keeper of the towers, who took refuge with the same Mériadec because her old drunkard of a father has lost his situation; there is yourself and the saw-bones who treated you to breakfast this morning; finally, there is a gentleman who was arrested, and wants to revenge himself for having passed four-and-twenty hours in prison. We have a hold on him, and we shall make it warm for him for having put you on our track. The others will have their turn—yours has come already, since you are caught. But we want the child."

"To kill him, eh?"

"What is that to you? He is not yours. You barely know him. And you can put him in our hands."

"I! You forget I'm in prison."

"That doesn't prevent you from giving us information about the inside of the house where he is."

"I don't know anything about it."

"The house is composed of three buildings. You must know in which one the child sleeps."

"And if I told you, you would take him away in the night?"

"Possibly so; but I should prefer a less violent method. You might, for instance, write and tell Mériadec that you are awaiting him and the boy here."

"You think he would come?"

"Yes, if you wrote and told him that you had found the man of whom he was in search, and that you can show him to the child to see if he will recognise him."

Fabreguette shuddered. This rascal must be a sorcerer to have guessed the plan of confronting the child with the murderer, which Sacha's three defenders had agreed upon in conjunction with Rose Verdier, and he was quite capable of profiting by this advantage to set a trap for Sacha and the young girl who would accompany him.

But the brave fellow soon recovered himself, and saw that it was best to dissimulate his indignation, to pretend even to enter into the views of the murderer's accomplice in order to gain time. He did not despair of escape, and it was important for him to know certain things of which he was still ignorant.

Whilst he was reflecting, the rascal who kept him prisoner took off his wig, his false beard, his blue spectacles, drew himself up and became once more in dress and appearance the major-domo.

"Ah!" cried Fabreguette, "you can boast of a rare talent for dis-guising yourself."

"You will see a good deal more than that if we can come to an agreement," sneered this strange individual, "and you can't do anything better than to come over to the strongest side. There is nothing but hard knocks to be gained with your companions in the Rue Cassette, whilst, if you serve us well, we will make your fortune. My master has a long arm and shovelfuls of money."

"Your master? Why not say your friend? You don't expect to make me believe that you are only a servant."

"It matters little what I am. I have been authorised to talk to you as I am doing, and I recommend you to accept what I propose. It's the only chance you have of saving your skin."

"I ask for nothing better; but a letter from me would not produce the effect that you suppose. Mériadec has never seen my writing; he will think my signature is forged, and he will not move a step."

"That depends on the style of the *billet-doux* which I ask you to write. It is for you to invent a story which will take that old fool in. What we want is the suppression of this association of redressers of wrong which you so foolishly joined. And you are in a position to procure us this satisfaction. Invent some dodges to draw them all here, one after the other. And when you have delivered them all into our hands, you will not only be set at liberty, but will be well paid."

"To promise and to perform are two different things! What guarantee have I that you will not suppress me as well?"

"My word ought to be sufficient. Besides, if you refuse you will be suppressed all the quicker. You ought not to hesitate between the certainty of dying of hunger and the hope of escaping from here. Make up your mind."

"You must give me time to make up a plan. You don't think it an easy matter to capture three men who are on their guard and a girl who is no fool—for you want the girl too, I suppose?"

"We want the child and all those who have seen him. And we shall have them, even if you do not help us. But you will help us, and you have too much wit not to be able to find a means. I grant you forty-eight hours. The day after to-morrow, during the afternoon, I will come and learn what your reflections have suggested."

"And you're going to leave me without light or food?"

"You can't complain. You will be able to reflect much better in the dark, because there will be nothing to divert your attention. They destroy a finch's eyes when they want to teach him to sing. And fasting will make your ideas clearer. You won't die in two days, after the breakfast I saw you eat this morning. You eat enough for four, my boy. I don't blame you for it, but if you want any more you would do well to prepare the letter which I want. On my next visit I will bring you some ink and paper; you will recite it to me, for you will have had time to learn it by heart; if it suits me you can write it on the spot; I will have it taken to the address, and if Mériadec falls into the trap you will be free—after you have given me guarantees, for you might betray me when you are at liberty."

"Guarantees? What do you mean by that?"

"I shall make you sign a statement in which you will admit that, of your own free will, and in consideration of a sum of money, you pointed out the way to me to possess myself of the child and of his protector. The sum will be specified—ten thousand francs—which I shall pay down as soon as Mériadec and the child are in my hands. I don't intend to capture all our enemies at once. We shall deal with the others afterwards. You see I am reasonable."

This was too much. Fabreguette's rage burst forth. He had contained himself thus far, but his anger overcame him now, and he cried out to his gaoler, as he shook his fist at him :

"Wretch ! you dare to propose to me to sell the life of a child and the life of an honest man for ten thousand francs !"

"You don't think it's enough," sneered the black-coated rascal. "I might go up to twelve thousand, if you do the thing well."

"Silence, villain ! if you offered me a million I would not betray my friends. Do you take me for such an one as yourself ? I will show you that I am not like you, a murderer and a coward. Yes, a coward, for you dare not come near me. You know that I should strangle you like the dog that you are. You can leave me to die of hunger, you will get nothing out of me, and your rascal of a friend, your false marquis, will not escape justice—he will be denounced to-night and arrested to-morrow."

"Thanks for the information ; I will go and warn our dear marquis."

Fabreguette saw that he had spoken imprudently, but he was no longer in possession of himself, and continued to pour imprecations on the head of his gaoler, who quietly approached the partition.

"Away, foul carrion ! that I may not see your base Judas's face."

And he spat in his face.

"Die then, fool !" said the man in black, suddenly raising the kind of shutter which hermetically closed the hole.

Fabreguette had no longer any prospect than that of death in this fast-closed prison. And what a death !

VI.

WHILST Fabreguette was falling into this cleverly-contrived snare, Rose Verdière was employing her time more profitably. One can do much in a day in Paris ; one afternoon had sufficed for her to move her things and arrange her workshop in the room which Mériadec had placed at her disposal. She was at home now, and there was nothing to prevent her from recommencing her busy life.

Still, she had found time to go with Sacha to the Champs-Élysées club, and to remain there in a cab from five o'clock until seven. But Paul Constantinowitch had not appeared, and on returning home from this fruitless expedition, Sacha had declared that he would go no more. Sacha was a most intractable auxiliary, and, from that day forth, Mériadec saw that he was not to be relied upon in the chase after the enigmatical murderer of the south tower. Sacha seemed to have forgotten his mother, and was perfectly at home in his new residence. He conducted himself as if he were the master in this house where the

kind baron had received him out of pure good-heartedness, and he unceremoniously announced that he intended to enjoy complete liberty, play as much as he pleased in Rose's workroom, and go out when he thought fit. He was surprised that Mériadec had neither carriages nor horses, and he asked quite naturally that a pony should be purchased for him to ride as often as he pleased. Such was his habit at Vérine, and he did not intend to give it up. Mériadec admired the effects of a seigniorial education. This spoilt child had no idea of the value of money; it was not quite certain whether he could read, and Mériadec, without regretting that he had taken him under his protection, began to ask himself what he should do with him. The best thing certainly would have been to send him to school; but it was necessary, first of all, to obtain Sacha's consent to this arrangement.

Now, Sacha would only listen to Rose Verdière, and obeyed no one but her. Mériadec had consulted her, and she had offered to teach all she knew to the recalcitrant child. She even proposed to take him with her every time she went out. Sacha would serve as a safeguard against the insulting men who are only too ready to accost a young girl who is alone, and Sacha asked for nothing better than to walk about the town, which he was dying to know, and where he would have lost himself without a guide.

On the day after the first meeting of the three friends, Rose had taken him to the Hospital, having gone there to see her father, whom she found in a very bad state. The old drunkard had recovered from the fit which had prostrated him; but he had remained paralysed on the right side, and he had not yet quite recovered his speech. His tongue acted with difficulty, and he could only utter unintelligible words. Daubrac stated, nevertheless, that he would live for some time yet, and that he did not despair of pulling him round altogether.

Sacha had behaved very well during this visit, and Daubrac, who was surprised to see him there, had made much of him. Upon which Sacha had taken upon himself to ask him to breakfast with him at Mériadec's, and the house-surgeon did not need to be asked twice to escort Rose Verdière back to the Rue Cassette, where the baron received them with open arms.

There was no lack of cordiality, or even of gaiety, at this morning meal.

The young girl, who was easier in her mind after Daubrac's comforting assurance, thought less of her father than of the kind friends who surrounded her. Daubrac, who considered her charming, told her stories to amuse her. Sacha had brought back a formidable appetite from his walk, and did due honour to the food to which his little mother helped him; Mériadec was so happy that he forgot the dangers which overhung them all. For the first time for many years he was not alone; he had family joys, joys which he had dreamt of but never known. He flattered himself with the hope that they would be lasting; he asked himself whether he would not do well to renounce the combat against a slippery rascal, and to content himself with the calm happiness which God had sent him. A faithful friend, a young girl to adore, a child to protect; what more was necessary for perfect happiness? And what did it matter to him that the dead woman should be avenged?

Nothing would have been lacking at this friendly feast if the joyous red-capped artist had been there to contribute his quota of gaiety. But Fabreguette did not appear, although he had promised the day before to come each day to confer with his allies. They waited in vain for him until one o'clock, and Daubrac inveighed against the negligence of this painter who did not keep his engagements. Daubrac might have remembered that he had left him on his way to the Rue Marbeuf, and should have bethought himself that he had met with some accident in his perilous expedition.

He did not bestow a moment's thought on it, and announced that before the end of the day he should go and drag him out of his attic in the Rue de la Huchette, where he was sleeping, no doubt, instead of presenting himself at the baron's house, as had been agreed. Rose took up the defence of the absent man; Mériadec, too, endeavoured to make excuses for him, and Sacha unburdened himself of his opinion, which was that he had no confidence in Fabreguette, and that they had better do without his assistance. He was too badly-dressed to go out with him, and this specimen of his approval made the young girl and her two friends smile.

They talked also of the captain, who had not promised to come, and whom they had to keep informed of the progress of the campaign which had been opened twenty-four hours before. There was nothing fresh to tell him, and, as a matter of fact, he did not appear desirous that they should go and see him. They agreed, therefore, to write to him if occasion arose, and this was not the case as yet, since things were exactly at the same stage as on the previous day.

Mériadec had not received, as he had expected, another summons to appear before the magistrate who had already called him; neither had Daubrac, nor Rose Verdière, and they somewhat prematurely concluded from this that the case had been dropped.

The meeting broke up, for Rose said that she had to go out at three o'clock, to take some work, which she had only just time to complete, to a shop in the Rue de Rivoli.

"Will you do me the favour to show me how artificial flowers are made?" said Daubrac. "I haven't the least idea."

"Willingly," said Rose, "if you will follow me to the room which Monsieur Mériadec has allowed me to turn into a workshop."

"I shall come too," said Sacha, "and when I'm tired of watching you at work I shall look at the pictures in the big books which are on the desks in the library. The baron will explain them to me."

This arrangement suited Mériadec, whom Sacha amused much, and who found an opportunity sometimes of teaching the young savage something; it suited Daubrac and Rose Verdière much better, for they had much to say to one another.

The library, which served also as a smoking and fencing-room, communicated with the work-room by means of a door which was always open, and they had to go through it first. Sacha stopped as soon as he saw the books—enormous folios, bound in red morocco—Don Quixote and Rabelais, illustrated by Doré. Mériadec took the child, lifted him on to a high stool, opened the first volume and began to

show him the beautiful pictures, in which were represented the adventures of the last of the knights-errant, his favourite hero.

Daubrac had something better on hand, and he followed the young girl into the workroom. Rose went and seated herself on a chair in front of a large deal table, loaded with various objects; there were skeins of wool, cuttings of silk, pieces of leather, tinted paper, different sized vases, saucers containing colours, brushes, a box full of flour, a pot of paste, a lighted stove, and a spirit-lamp.

"Goodness!" cried Daubrac, "what a lot of utensils to imitate flowers which grow of their own accord!"

"I have no sun to help me," said the young girl, laughing; "but it is less complicated than you think. You will see. I have to take home to-day an order of moss-roses, and I want a dozen still to complete the quantity they are expecting at the shop. I will show you how I am going to set about making them. Look!"

As she spoke she took a piece of brass wire and attached to it some strands of unbleached silk, which she cut into equal lengths with her scissors.

"There are the stems," said she. "I dip them, as you see, in paste, to make them stiff. I dry them at the flame of this lamp. There! now that they are dry, I moisten the ends with this paste—gum arabic mixed with flour—then I plunge them into this vessel filled with semolina dyed yellow. See, each stem has caught up a grain of semolina; the heart of the rose is made."

"Wonderful!" cried the doctor, who was taking great pleasure in following the movements of the Angel of the chimes' pretty pink fingers.

"Now," continued the young girl, "I come to putting on the petals, and choosing them well, and fitting them on well, for I want my rose to be handsome, so that you shall not think me clumsy. I have some here all ready cut out. They are of very fine cambric. I take them up one by one with these pincers. I damp them; I put a little carmine on them with this fine brush—you see I am careful to leave the edges rather paler. I plaster them round the stems, I gaufer them with this iron, which is still hot, because I did some work this morning, before going out. My rose begins already to assume a certain shape."

"That is to say that a butterfly would light on it."

"Oh! not yet. Butterflies are good judges. Here are the leaves of the calyx. I had already cut them out from a piece of green taffeta, and afterwards put them in starch. I have only to put them on. Now it's done."

"Upon my word, I don't know why people still take a pleasure in planting rose-trees."

"I should be very sorry if no more were planted. I make artificial flowers, but I only love the real ones."

"Then, allow me to bring you some. I live close to the market where they sell them."

"We shall see about that. Let me finish my lesson, as you are not tired. Should you like my rose to have buds? No, it would take too long, I should have to sew up the leather, after having stuffed it with

gummed cotton wool, and you would not have enough patience to wait till it was finished. I shall only put on the leaves. If I had to gauffer them, I should not have finished, for it is much more complicated than doing the petals; one has to produce the shininess on one side and the velvet on the other to imitate the fibres—but you see I have some left all ready made. I have only to put them on. There they are. Now I wrap the stem with thread, and, over that, with green paper. That's all, sir. My rose is finished, and you are at liberty to admire it."

"I do admire it, and should like to have it."

"An artificial flower! Goodness! what would you do with it?"

"I should keep it in remembrance of you."

"I could understand that, if we were never to see one another any more, but you have promised me to come here every day."

"And I shall not fail to do so. Besides, I shall see you at the Hospital. But things are always changing in this world, and you will not remain for ever with our friend Mériadec. When your father has recovered, you will go and live with him."

"My father would not prevent me from seeing you, but I doubt whether you would take the trouble to climb up to the poor lodging which we should live in. It will be on the fifth floor, if not higher."

"To see you I would climb up to the platform of the towers of Notre-Dame."

"You are making fun of me. That is very wrong. If I were like many others, I might think that you loved me, and I should be unhappy all my life."

"Why? It is nice to be loved. If a woman loved me, I should be beyond measure delighted. I mean if she loved me seriously and with her whole heart."

"I don't know how one can love otherwise. But I am only a poor girl, and you will be a great doctor. What would become of me if I became attached to you? It would kill me."

"Not at all. It is my business to prevent sick people from dying, and I should cure you, as I shall cure your father; but you are not ill."

"I shall try not to be so, and I hope that I shall remain your friend."

"Nothing but my friend?" asked the doctor, approaching the young girl who was giving the finishing touch to her moss-rose.

"Take care, you will soil yourself," said she quickly. "The paste—the carmine——"

"You forget your hot iron—I should burn myself—and I am burning enough already."

At this moment they heard Sacha's clear voice alternating with Mériadec's deep bass. A grand discussion had just arisen in the library.

"Your Don Quixote is a fool," cried Sacha.

"A sublime fool," replied the baron, always ready to defend his hero.

"To take windmills for giants is not sublime; it's silly."

"So, if you found yourself in the same position, you would do the same as Sancho Panza, who is standing at a distance and holding his arms up to heaven, instead of rushing to his master's assistance?"

And as the child did not reply, Mériadec continued hotly :

"A generous fool is worth more than a wise poltroon. And I am surprised that you should think the contrary, you who are well born, you whom I have sheltered and am protecting, at the risk of drawing upon myself the vengeance of the wretch who killed your mother."

There was silence, then a sound of moving chairs and stamping feet.

"The pupil has understood the lesson," said Daubrac, after having looked to see what was going on in the next room. "He has just thrown himself on Mériadec's neck and is kissing him, with tears in his eyes. There is certainly a good deal in the lad. You will complete his education, and I am going to leave you with him."

"You are angry with me?" asked the Angel of the chimes quickly.

"Not so, since I am taking your moss-rose," replied Daubrac, taking possession of the flower; "but it is time for me to be going. I feel that if I remained any longer I should propose to you, and should set you against me altogether. And, so as not to disturb our friend whilst he is expressing such beautiful sentiments, I shall escape by the grand staircase, which leads directly into the courtyard."

Rose Verdière did not attempt to detain him, and he went off without the baron noticing his departure. When Mériadec once became immersed in the superb folio where were set forth the adventures of Don Quixote, he forgot everything. And it needed something serious to drag him away from his favourite book.

He was enjoying it more than ever to-day, because he was explaining its beauties to Sacha. The child was beginning to appreciate them; at each picture he plied his master with questions, and the latter launched into enthusiastic commentaries, suggested by his chivalrous spirit, similar to his first observations about the combat with the windmills.

Sacha became fired at these ardent discourses; his Russian temperament was gaining the upper hand, and he had very soon come to despise Sancho's prosaic common-sense, which at first he had naïvely admired. He burned with ardour to apply the baron's generous ideas; he blushed at having praised a peasant's prudence, he who had been born a gentleman, and he talked of engaging, single-handed, that Paul Constantinowitch, whom he repudiated as a father.

Both he and Mériadec had quite forgotten the young girl who was at work close to them; but after Daubrac's departure she did not lose a word of their conversation, and as soon as she had finished her work, she slipped off on tiptoe, taking with her the box of moss-roses which she had to deliver before three o'clock to the dealer who had ordered them.

She had just enough time for the walk, and she did not care to take Sacha, who would have delayed her, as she knew by experience. Sacha would stop in front of the jewellers' windows, and those shops where they sell ready-made clothes; he stopped, too, each time he saw a fine horse go by.

Rose had been out with him during the morning, and the walk from the Rue Cassette to the hospital had occupied an hour, not to mention that this terrible child plied his conductress with awkward questions.

Thus, she preferred that he should not accompany her to the shop where she was going on business. He would have talked in a way likely to compromise her, and his presence would have been embarrassing before the shopkeeper and his assistants, who might have asked her who this boy, clothed in the Russian fashion, was. It was certainly best to leave him at home for this once. He would be safe under the baron's care.

Rose went into her bedroom, which had also a separate staircase. She dressed quickly, and left the courtyard without any one noticing her departure.

More prudent than Fabreguette, she glanced to the right and left before making for the Rue de Varennes, and she saw that the Rue Cassette was deserted. Foot passengers there are always rare, but to-day there was not a single one, and no one at the windows of the old houses opposite to the Baron de Mériadec's residence.

Rose never suspected, of course, that the artist had come to grief the day before, through not having taken the precaution to look whether he was being watched; but a workgirl's life had taught her circumspection. Accustomed to be followed by loungers in search of adventures, she never ventured abroad without first looking whether any idiot was watching for her in order to go in the same direction as she did.

She had to go to the Rue de Rivoli, opposite the Tour Saint-Jacques, and the journey was rather a long one. But she had a way of trotting along which took her over a good deal of ground in a short time, and which defeated the manoeuvres of the gallants. It distanced them. And besides, those kind of gentry are only in search of easy conquests, and they saw from her walk that if, by quickening their own, they succeeded in overtaking her, they would only have their labour for their pains. To tell the truth, the only women who are followed in Paris are those who are not sorry to be followed, and Rose knew it well.

She took the shortest way by the Place Saint-Sulpice, the Boulevard, and the Pont Saint-Michel.

From the Place and the quay were plainly to be seen the hospital to which her father had been carried, and the towers of Notre-Dame, where she had spent such happy years. This remembrance caused tears to come into her eyes, but she did not stop to dream of her departed happiness, and traversed the Boulevard du Palais, without thinking of the magistrate who at that moment was perhaps seated in his room, and who might at any time summon her to appear before him. She thought only of Daubrac, and she reproached herself for having perhaps allowed him to guess the secret which she would have preferred to keep to herself; she said to herself that she should have treated him more coldly, discouraged him even, by telling him that he would be losing his time in making love to her. She trembled to have betrayed herself by a look, by an inflection of voice; she almost repented of having engaged to see him every day, and she promised to keep a stricter watch on herself for the future.

These reflections, which much resembled remorse, occupied her mind as far as the door of the shop where her business took her.

There the whole staff knew and paid attention to her. The assistants complimented her on her beauty. The young ladies asked her whether she was not thinking of marrying soon, and the proprietor deigned to smile on her, after having examined one by one the flowers which she had brought. Unfortunately, he knew that she was the daughter of the keeper of the towers, and he began to talk to her about the affair which all the papers had described. It only needed this to spoil the pleasure which Rose felt at being so well received. She gave evasive replies to all the questions which were put to her.

She did not even dare to say that her father had lost his place. She would have been obliged to tell where she had lived since the catastrophe, for the proprietor was particular about knowing the addresses of all the girls who worked for him, and she would have found herself in the cruel position of being forced to tell a lie, or of confessing that she was living under the roof of a bachelor. As soon as her business was done, she went away quite sad. She perceived now the drawbacks to her position which she had not looked at before. What would people think of her when they knew how she was living now? and sooner or later it would be known. It only needed, in case of a hurried order, for her employer to send to her old home in the north tower. It had often happened before, and would do so again, for he entrusted certain difficult jobs to her alone.

Her mind quickly became excited, and she soon began to ask herself whether it would not be best to leave the hospitable house in the Rue Cassette, and live, as did many of her own class, in an attic which she would furnish as best she could. She had the time to seek for one now, and to explain to the generous Mériadec why she was leaving him.

She said all this to herself as she walked alongside the railings which surround the square of the Tour Saint-Jacques. She entered it mechanically, and, so as to be able to think more at her ease, she seated herself on a chair in the shadow of the tower.

It was a favourite place of hers, and in fine weather she rarely failed to rest herself there after leaving the shop in the Rue de Rivoli. Sometimes she sat there the whole afternoon and worked at some embroidery, and no one had ever thought of disturbing her at this honest occupation.

But no two days are alike.

The square wore its ordinary look; it was rather more animated than usual, for the day was so fine.

The old tower of the departed church of Saint-Jacques la Boucherie reared itself, massive and sombre, in the midst of a profusion of flowers; and the loafers of the neighbourhood had come in crowds to salute the fresh verdure.

Servants, nurses, and a few private soldiers were crowding the free seats. People of a higher class were occupying the groups of chairs. Bands of children ran joyously about the paths, frightening the sparrows which live in the tower and dine on the bread which is plentifully thrown down for them.

From the place which she had chosen Rose had this gay scene beneath her eyes, and she was out of the way of the wind and of unwelcome attentions.

The base of the tower has four façades, separated one from another by stone buttresses which form four distinct compartments.

The young girl had placed her chair against one of these buttresses, and was about to abandon herself again to her melancholy reflections. She envied the happiness of the mothers and the carelessness of the little girls who were dancing in a ring.

She too had formerly played in a square—the one which has been constructed behind the apsis of Notre-Dame—and she said to herself that those happy days would never return. She was doomed never to know the joys of maternity, since she would never marry. Daubrac could not take a simple workgirl as his wife; Daubrac was the only man she would have dreamed of marrying if she had been less reasonable, and she knew that this dream would never be realised.

She sighed as she looked at the *grisettes* crossing the square on their lovers' arms. Certainly she did not wish to be like them, and the lot with which they contented themselves had no attractions for her, but she almost regretted that God had made her otherwise than these hare-brained girls. They were not proud; their mercenary hearts beat for any handsome youth, and they profited by their youth, without troubling themselves about the days of misfortune which age would bring.

It only rested with the Angel of the chimes to follow their example, to fold her wings which were carrying her towards an ideal which she would never attain, to place a limit to her desires, and to content herself with a lover instead of asking for a husband whom she would never find.

She was so pretty that no man could pass her without looking at her.

The old men, those retired veterans in love, smiled with pleasure at the sight of her, as old soldiers admire a battle-picture. The young ones stopped dumbfounded and blushed with delight. The connoisseurs of middle age examined her from the corners of their eyes, and tried to think of some means to accost her.

There were already two or three pacing round the clock-tower at whose foot this marvel of beauty was sitting, and she was holding herself in readiness to foil their manœuvres by leaving her place directly they came too near. One man, however, passed without paying any attention to her, a man whom she noticed involuntarily, because he differed from all the others who were looking at her. He was undoubtedly a gentleman, and not, like the others, a petty tradesman.

He was tall, well made, and dressed with tasteful elegance. His class frequented the square of Saint-Jacques but little, and doubtless he had come there to await some one who had not yet arrived, for he kept looking towards the Place du Châtelet, and after standing for a short time in the middle of a path he took a seat on a chair near Rose in one of the recesses at the base of the tower.

They could not see one another, separated as they were by a stone partition; but she knew he was there close against the buttress, for she had heard the back of his chair strike the wall, and the sand crunch under his feet.

From the recess which he had chosen he commanded a full view of

the square, and even the approach to the Pont au Change, which connects the right bank with the Cité.

He lit a cigar, the smoke of which would have revealed his presence to his neighbour, if he had intended to conceal himself ; but he did not seem to trouble himself about her, probably because he had not noticed that she was there. Why did this man make Rose feel uneasy ? She herself would have been much puzzled to say. She did not know him, and there was nothing out of the ordinary in his behaviour. But there are certain unexplained and unexplainable impressions which may be called veritable presentiments. Nervous women are subject to them, and under certain circumstances the gift of second sight comes to them all at once. They divine what is passing at a distance, and they foresee what is about to happen.

Rose felt that this man had had some connection with the affair of the towers, and that he had an appointment in the square with some one who had also played a part in that gloomy drama.

She remembered that Monsieur de Saint-Briac had been followed the day before, and she imagined that all Sacha's defenders must be surrounded by mysterious enemies who kept watch upon them.

She found a little comfort in the thought that these enemies could not know her, since she was not there when the murderer had passed her father's room with his victim and Sacha ; but they might know where the child was ; they might try to carry him off, and the young girl became quite anxious to see him again.

She was about to get up and start for the Rue Cassette, when she saw at the entrance to the square a man who for several minutes had been making signs in the distance to her neighbour. This man was approaching hurriedly ; he took no notice of her, and the fear of attracting his attention kept her rooted to her chair.

The two men met and sat down side by side behind the buttress, and close to it, so that Rose Verdière could hear their conversation if they raised their voices.

She was anxious to know whether her suspicions had any foundation, or whether she had taken honest men for accomplices of Paul Constantinowitch, and she remained.

"All goes well," said the new comer. "The letter has reached its destination."

"Are you sure of that ?" asked the other.

"Quite sure. I gave it myself to the usher who keeps the door, telling him that it was on important business, and giving him a ten-franc piece which he pocketed with the most lively satisfaction. Our good magistrate was busy examining witnesses, and had given orders that no one should enter. But the business was nearly concluded, and the letter must have been delivered by this time."

"Then, the catastrophe will not be long coming, and our dear captain will have a bad time of it."

"Provided that the fool of a husband does not arrive too late. The lady was to be at her lover's at three o'clock, and it is past three."

Rose, who did not lose a word of this dialogue, began to understand.

Certainly God had inspired the Angel of the chimes with the

thought of sitting there, and it was written that old buildings should play a prominent part in the affair of the murder of the Countess Xenia.

The assassin had thrown her from the top of one of the towers of Notre-Dame, and a providential chance led two of his accomplices to the foot of the tower of Saint-Jacques, expressly that the protectress of the dead woman's child should overhear their confidences.

It was the counterpart of the scene at the Restaurant Duval, where Fabreguette and Daubrac had betrayed themselves to a supposed deaf man.

Rose Verdière had expected at first to hear some trivial conversation. The men spoke of a letter given to an usher at the door of a room, and this conveyed no meaning to her mind. The words "examine witnesses" had excited her attention, but her mind had not fully grasped their meaning until the first arrival had said with a sneer, "Our dear captain will have a bad time of it."

This evidently had reference to Monsieur de Saint-Briac, and these wretches had just denounced to her husband a woman who at that moment was at the captain's house. The half-confidences which he had imparted to his new friends in the Rue Cassette the day before, left no room for doubt on the subject to Rose Verdière, who had listened to them attentively. She had even remembered his address. Saint-Briac had taken care not to mention the name of his mistress's husband, but what mattered it who this husband was, so long as he was the kind of man to kill his wife and her lover? And there was no time to lose to prevent this double murder.

Rose was about to get up and hurry off to the Avenue d'Antin. She sympathised with the captain, and thought only of saving him.

A sentence which she heard detained her.

"Between ourselves, my dear fellow," continued the last comer, "I think you are in too much of a hurry. We are not certain that the husband will blow the captain's brains out. Gentlemen of the law are not in the habit of carrying revolvers in their pockets. If the matter is not settled before a tribunal it will probably end in a duel, where the chances will be all in Saint-Briac's favour. And if he survives he will have no difficulty in guessing who informed against him. We shall have in him an implacable enemy, and he will not spare us. Now, he has communicated with the great idiot who is protecting Sacha, and he knows where the mischievous urchin is who nearly had you captured the other day at the Morgue, and who will recognise you some day or other—Saint-Briac has only to send him to wait at the door of your club between four and five o'clock."

"I do not go there now, and you know I have left the Hôtel Continental. A week to-day we shall be over the frontier, but I will not leave France before that man has received a good lesson."

"I can understand that, but I think you should have begun by suppressing Sacha. The captain is not dangerous. It is in the Rue Cassette that the danger is. You have, as they say, put the cart before the horse. Fortunately I am here to repair your mistakes. I have arranged a little expedition which will be successful, and when you have got possession of the colonel's offspring, I guarantee to exterminate this serpent. Dead men tell no tales. Twist his neck."

"That is my intention. When do you hope to hand him over to me?"

"This evening. I've already boxed one, and the others will have their turns. But it is Sacha whom I want, and I have invented a dodge to get him outside."

"Not so loud! We might be overheard."

"By whom? we are all alone in this nook, and on the other side of this wall, there are only the little nurse and some children who are making an infernal din."

This was true. A band of children had just invaded the recess where Rose was sitting, and the young girl whom this rascal took for a nurse blessed this inrush of urchins, who did not prevent her from hearing her neighbours' conversation, for she had sharp ears.

"No matter," continued the other. "It's not safe to talk in the open air, and we will decamp from here without further delay. I know what we are about, that is enough for me. And I have got nothing to do but await the effect of the bomb which is about to explode in the Avenue d'Antin. As to the other matter, you can explain it to me as we walk back to my carriage, which is waiting for me on the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville."

"As you like. But I shall leave you there, for I have set my mind on making an end of the interesting orphan of the Rue Cassette before the night is out."

Rose, crouching against the sheltering wall, heard the two villains get up, and lowered her head, in case they should think of looking at her as they passed. But they took no notice of her. She saw them leave the square and go off by way of the Avenue Victoria.

It only remained for her to convey succour to those whom they threatened with speedy vengeance, and she was resolved to do it, even though she would expose herself to the greatest dangers in attempting to save them. But to whom should she go first? She was much more interested in Sacha than in Monsieur de Saint-Briac or the woman who was deceiving her husband. Rose, like all virtuous girls, lacked indulgence for those who are untrue to their marriage vows, and she was not particularly anxious to rescue Madame de Malverne from the fearful position in which she had placed herself. She did not know her, after all, and she owed no help to her.

Her first idea, then, was to leave her to the well-deserved fate which awaited her.

But there was the captain, and the captain was an ally! He had taken up arms warmly against the murderer; he served the good cause. Certainly he had done very wrong to turn a married woman from the path of duty, and yet Rose almost forgave him. She did not like to leave him to be surprised by a furious man, when it only depended on her to warn him and prevent a catastrophe.

The two villains whom she had just overheard had not mentioned the husband's name: they had said that he was a magistrate, but Rose did not think that this magistrate was precisely the one who would one day summon her as a witness.

There was nothing to stop her, then, except the danger which Sacha was running.

The wretches spoke of carrying him off to kill him, and one of them had said that he was certain of succeeding that very night.

That meant, no doubt, that he was awaiting the night to carry out this atrocious plot, for, daring as he was, he would not venture to force his way into the house in the Rue Cassette in broad daylight. Mériadec was there to protect his house, and Mériadec took such care of the child that cunning would no more succeed than violence.

There was no immediate danger, so far as they were concerned, whilst there was not a minute to lose before putting the captain on his guard.

The step, to be successful, must be taken at once, for she must get there before the terrible husband, who was, perhaps, already on his way to fall like a thunder-clap on the guilty couple.

"By taking a cab I can get to the Avenue d'Antin in twenty minutes," said Rose to herself; "I shall not take long to explain the position of things to Monsieur de Saint-Briac, and I shall not wait there, for I do not care about seeing his mistress. The same cab will take me to the Rue Cassette, and I shall relate my journey to Monsieur de Mériadec, who will take measures to protect Sacha. Come!" concluded the young girl, "I shall not have spent an unprofitable day, and Monsieur Daubrac will be pleased with me."

VII.

AFTER having left his new friends of the Rue Cassette Jacques de Saint-Briac had gone home, and had not left there except to go to the club at the time when Monsieur de Pancorbo usually came there, and when it had been arranged that Rose should be there in a cab with Sacha. He had gone there on foot, walking close to the houses, and keeping as much out of sight as possible, so as to avoid being seen by the young Russian and hailed by him from the cab.

He saw the cab and passed it in safety, but he did not meet the Spanish marquis in the rooms of the club. He awaited him there without result, and for such a long time that he finally dined there, and in very tedious company. He had next to him at table some men whom he barely knew, and as he was not in a festive mood he only opened his mouth for the purpose of eating; but he heard that they were talking of the *hidalgo*, and not in very flattering terms. The gamblers who had been "cleaned out" by the Castilian were running him down openly, and some of them did not scruple to express doubts as to his honesty.

There had happened what frequently does happen in Paris, where people are often too ready to throw themselves at foreigners' heads. As long as they look respectable and play high the clubs do not hesitate to admit them. They are not asked for certificates of birth. Two introducers are sufficient, and rich men can always obtain these. Then the reaction sets in. They win too often. The losers begin by taking a dislike to them, and end—a trifle late in the day—by being uneasy as to their antecedents. At present they had nothing definite to say against Monsieur de Pancorbo, but ugly rumours about him were evidently afloat, and his unusual absence seemed to lend them an air of truth.

One of the guests said that, having gone and asked for the *marquis* at the *Hôtel Continental*, he had learnt that he had moved from there a few hours before.

Had he gone altogether? Men asked one another the question, and could hardly believe that such was the case, for a lucky player does not disappear all at once. He remains to follow up his luck. It is the losers who, when their credit has gone, make a bolt one fine day in order to avoid paying their debts. But the captain had his reasons for thinking that *Monsieur de Pancorbo* would no more be seen at the *baccarat* table, and even that *Monsieur de Pancorbo* was preparing to leave for ever the beautiful land of France.

The prospect of this abrupt departure was by no means unpleasant to him.

Saint-Briac was not particularly longing to punish the murderer of the Countess *Xenia*, nor even to avenge himself for the unjust arrest which he had undergone; but he *was* anxious, on the other hand, to preserve the woman whom he loved from a frightful misfortune. And this man's disappearance would have delivered him from a terrible uneasiness.

He reproached himself already for having declared war against him, and he almost regretted having allied himself with *Mériadec* and *Sacha's* other defenders. They were but risking their lives by commencing hostilities, whilst the captain was exposing his mistress to a catastrophe. The threat contained in the *marquis's* letter was there, suspended over the heads of the guilty couple. And for this unscrupulous bandit to put it into execution it only needed an act of imprudence on the part of one of the other allies. *Saint-Briac* had earnestly requested them not to act without consulting him, and, above all, warning him. But he mistrusted their ardour.

Fabreguette especially alarmed him, and the worthy *Mériadec* did not seem to him much more discreet than the painter of the *Rue de la Huchette*. *Rose Verdière* lacked experience. *Daubrac* prudence, and *Sacha* was possessed of the devil. All these allies could not but injure him. All were, so to say, under the thumb of *Monsieur de Malverne*, who would not fail to examine them shortly.

A careless word let slip by one of these witnesses before the magistrate would ruin all. And as they only knew half the truth, they would not think that they were doing wrong in speaking to the magistrate of their relations with the captain. They might go so far as to tell him that the captain had begged them not to be in a hurry to take action against *Monsieur de Pancorbo*.

Now *Monsieur de Malverne* was gifted with a natural sagacity which the exercise of his magisterial functions had vastly developed. And if he did not already perceive that his wife was unfaithful to him, it was because he loved her too much to suspect her; not to mention that a special Providence has ordained that a man shall always be the last to discover his wife's foibles. A chance word, anything, might open his eyes, even supposing that the murderer did not write him an anonymous letter.

Already, when he had gone to see him to ask him for *Mériadec's* address, *Saint-Briac* fancied he noticed that his reception of him was no

longer the same, and they had parted less cordially than usual, without engaging to see one another again. For the moment, the captain attached no importance to that, and he proposed to himself to avoid, just at present, all meetings with Monsieur de Malverne; but this was only a compromise which had no effect on their mutual positions. The mine remained loaded, it might spring at any moment, and it only rested with Monsieur de Pancorbo to apply the light.

The worst was, that Madame de Malverne had only a very imperfect idea of the danger which she was running. Saint-Briac had not been able, in her husband's presence, to warn her that henceforward she was at the mercy of a villain; he had not seen her again since dining there, and he had taken good care not to write. They never wrote to one another; not that Hugues ever took upon himself to open letters addressed to his wife, but because they had devised a means of corresponding which seemed to them safer and more convenient. They made use of the *Figaro*, which inserts at so much a line advertisements written in characters which are undecipherable for all those who do not possess the key.

They had agreed to change the meaning of each letter of the alphabet, and by this means they made appointments which Monsieur de Malverne could not discover, for he certainly never engaged in the childish pastime which consists in reading these printed riddles.

It was thus that Odette had informed her lover that she would wait for him at the end of the Pont Notre-Dame, on the day of the catastrophe which they were both of them very far from expecting.

She did not venture to go to his house, knowing well that her husband often went there, and, like so many other criminal lovers, this couple had not got beyond meeting at houses of assignation.

The captain took his own advertisements to the office of the paper. Madame de Malverne sent hers by an honest woman who had been her nurse, and who was a pensioner on her kindness; a devoted messenger, and the more trustworthy that she was ignorant of the aim and contents of the message.

Since their last and most unfortunate meeting, Odette and Jacques had not dared to make use of this means of communication, and yet never had they so desired to see one another, if it were only to agree as to their future line of conduct. Jacques, who knew more than his accomplice, understood better than she the imminence of the peril, and racked his brains to contrive a means of meeting his mistress.

He could find none that night. He had gone to the club; he remained there and tried to forget his anxiety at the card-table. He took a hand in the game which the Spaniard should have joined, lost a large sum, went home towards the small hours, went to bed still less at peace with himself and his fellow-men, slept till mid-day and rose without a thought of the surprise which was in store for him.

Sleep clears the brain, and Saint-Briac, on awaking more calm and collected, decided that he must put an end to this intolerable suspense, and that he would go that very day and see Madame de Malverne.

She was at home from five to six; he was free to go there whenever he pleased; no one would be surprised to see him there. By getting there at half-past four, he hoped that he would be alone, and even if he

were not the first arrival, he would be certain to find an opportunity for a few moments' private conversation. Monsieur de Malverne hardly ever came in from the Palais before six o'clock; and if he came home earlier than usual he would not be sorry to see his intimate friend, especially in the presence of his wife's callers.

Uncertainty is the worst of all evils, and Jacques, consoled by the resolution which he had just taken, made a very good breakfast.

After this indispensable meal he ordered his valet to prepare everything which he would want for dressing, to go and pay in at the club nine thousand francs which he had lost the night before, to withdraw the I O U's signed by him, and afterwards to go to Tattersall's to inquire whether a horse which he had sent there had been sold. The groom was out exercising the other horse, which he had not ridden for three days.

The captain needed an hour or two alone to prepare himself for the interview which would doubtless decide the fate of his connection with Odette. He threw himself into an enormous easy chair, lit a cigar, and remained for a long time plunged in reflection; he turned over in his mind the chances which remained to him, good and bad; he girded up his loins, as the saying is, and he made up his mind that he was strong enough to combat the evil designs of the false marquis.

He had had no news of his allies since his visit to the Rue Cassette; so all must be going on well in that quarter. It was not impossible that the menacing Spaniard had left Paris for good, and there was no positive proof that Monsieur de Malverne had any suspicions.

Almost consoled by this examination of the present state of affairs, he bethought himself, before dressing, of glancing at the papers which were lying on his table, and which he had not yet read.

He unfolded the one in which appeared their cipher advertisements, and looked first of all at the fourth page. He did this chiefly to clear his conscience, for he did not expect to find anything to interest him.

He was wrong. In the usual place he saw, at the beginning of the first line, in capital letters, the word ODE, and he started with surprise. They were the first letters of the word Odette, the signal agreed upon with Madame de Malverne, to save her the trouble of deciphering other advertisements.

When the message was from her the three capital letters formed the word CAP, that is to say, Captain. There was never any mistake about it, and the reason they had adopted this kind of trade mark was to avoid having to decipher the advertisements which did not concern them, and which swarm in the paper which they made use of.

Saint-Briac had inserted nothing the day before. He was amazed on seeing the three letters with which he began all his messages to his mistress. He could not believe it was a chance coincidence, and he began to wonder who could have made use of this formula which was intended to attract Madame de Malverne's attention. Whoever it might be, it was with no good intention that he had substituted himself for Odette's habitual correspondent.

"Supposing it is Pancorbo who has thought of this plan to ruin her?" said the captain to himself.

He could easily ascertain, for by dint of deciphering these cryptograms he had come to read them almost at sight.

But he was so upset that he had great trouble in applying the very simple system by the aid of which he made out the meaning of the words which, in appearance, had none.

Each letter was used in the place of that which precedes it; B for A, A for Z, and so on. The operation is not difficult; but Saint-Briac's mind was in such a state that he could not easily recollect the order of the letters of the alphabet.

He succeeded laboriously in putting together the first five words, which presented the following appearance:—H rgzkk dwodbs xnt zs lx gntrd. And without needing to resort to the method indicated by Edgar Poe in his charming story of "The Golden Beetle," he made out that this puzzle meant, "I shall expect you at my house."

This was promising, and the two words, snlnqnv Vdcmdrczx, meant to-morrow, Wednesday.

"Wednesday! that is to-day," cried the captain, "and Odette has been told that I am awaiting her here! It is a trap set for her, and the miscreant author of this infernal lie must have told Hugues. He hopes that she will come, and that her husband, warned by an anonymous letter, will surprise us together. I will save her, I will go out—hurry to her house. But first of all, I must see for what time the villain has made the appointment here."

He set to work again to decipher, and as the danger had sharpened his faculties, he had soon made out, "At three o'clock." "It is too late," he murmured, striking his forehead. "If she has believed this abominable message, she is already on the way here. If I go out we should miss one another, perhaps, and if I met her Malverne might see us together. It is best that I should wait here. Fortunately I am alone, and my servants will not be back yet. When she comes, I shall open the door myself. Ah! there is no doubt about it now, it is the doing of the villain who murdered the countess; but how did he find out that we corresponded in the paper? Why, simply by reading the agony column. He must have noticed the three first letters of the word Odette, and the three first of the word Captain; it needed no more to attract his attention, and our system of writing is not difficult to decipher. And to think that it was I who proposed it to Odette! What folly!—but it is fruitless to regret it; I will endeavour to repair it—or at least to guard against the consequences."

And he began to devise some means. It was all very well to open the door himself; but he must know to whom. The ring of a bell gives no indication as to the person who is at the door, and Saint-Briac would run the risk of letting in the husband when he thought he was letting in the wife.

It was possible also that it might be one of his friends, or any other individual, and that would have been still worse, for this ill-timed visitor might arrive at the same time as Odette, encounter and recognise her.

What way was there out of the difficulty? He could see none, and whilst he was racking his brains Madame de Malverne was perhaps on her way there. He pictured her to himself, hurrying along and keep-

ing close to the houses in the Rue d'Antin, and he pictured, too, the husband following her in the distance, then concealing himself to allow her to enter the house, then falling on her like a thunder-clap.

On reflection, however, he said to himself that if Hugues, having been warned by an anonymous letter, should make up his mind to surprise them, he would not make a scene in the street, and, besides, things could hardly happen so unfortunately that they should both arrive at the same time.

He recollected, too, that in war, when the enemy is expected, the first thing to be done is to scan the approaches to the post which one occupies.

He could not send out scouts into the Avenue d'Antin, but there was no reason why he should not himself take the place of a sentinel, so as to keep a look out in the distance, and an idea struck him as to the way in which he should do this.

His rooms were on a ground floor, so raised above the level of the street that they were out of sight of inquisitive passers-by.

The drawing-room windows, and those of the dining and smoking-rooms, looked out on to the Avenue d'Antin, the others on to a pretty courtyard, which was turfed and planted with shrubs.

All had venetian blinds, which at that moment were open. The captain hastened to close those in the dining-room, taking care to leave the others half open, and in this way he established a post of observation which he immediately occupied.

It was a most convenient one for scrutinising the two sides of the avenue. It was only necessary to slightly move one of the laths in order to see in the far distance the people who were approaching from the quay, and those who came from the Rond Point of the Champs-Élysées.

If, as was probable, Madame de Malverne came from her house in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, she must come from the direction of the Rond Point. Monsieur de Malverne, who was most probably at the Palais, might, on the other hand, approach by way of the quay.

Saint-Briac, standing against the open window, looked alternately to the right and left, without showing himself or making the slightest noise, and he had the satisfaction of noting that he was well concealed, for he saw people passing just underneath him without raising their heads. The entrance was on his right and quite close to him—a handsome gateway, which remained open during the day. The carriages, on leaving the stables at the far end of the court-yard, went out by it, and the entrance to his rooms led directly into this broad corridor.

As he kept watch the captain prepared himself for events. He began by satisfying himself that no cabs were standing in the avenue. He mistrusted cabs since his recent misadventure, and he knew that those vehicles serve equally well to conceal jealous husbands as to carry happy lovers.

"Malverne is not there," he said to himself. "Now, one of two things will happen: either he will arrive first and will find no one in; or else, on the other hand, his wife will arrive before him, and I shall have time to get her away. Hum! All this is very unsafe. I arrange things to suit me, and possibly they will happen quite otherwise.

Supposing, for instance, that Malverne comes and plants himself in front of my house and remains there till he sees Odette enter! What should I do in that case? Well, I should make a sortie. Sorties are the last resource of the besieged. I should walk straight up to him. I should ask him what he was waiting there for, and he would be so ashamed of being caught in the act of playing the spy that he would beg my pardon before going. And if—to imagine the worst—Odette arrived during the conversation, she would see how things stood, on seeing us together, and would have sense enough to make up some tale. After all, she has a perfect right to go through the Avenue d'Antin."

Saint-Briac reasoned thus to try and comfort himself, but he only half succeeded, and he felt more heavily than ever the weight of the deadly sin he had committed in deceiving his best friend. Current morality, the morality of the world, is indulgent towards these acts, but this morality was not his. His heart was too sensitive to absolve him from such a criminal weakness, and he could not picture without terror the fearful consequences. What should he say to this outraged man if he discovered his treason? Hugues de Malverne would have a right to despise Jacques de Saint-Briac, to deny him the honour of fighting him, and Jacques, loaded with shame, would have to bow his head to it.

If husbands could only imagine what is passing at certain moments in the heart and brain of the lovers who are deceiving them, they would be half avenged.

Women bear remorse better, when they suffer any at all. That is, no doubt, because they love more passionately. However enamoured a man may be, he never loses his head; he is conscious of the value of his acts, and never totally loses the notion of good and evil. A woman, on the contrary, when she loves violently, gives herself up entirely; she forgets her husband, her children, her social position; she thinks only of her lover. She squanders her reputation, overleaps what are called prejudices, and openly braves public opinion. And all this for a man whom she will some day betray, and who is often not worth so much as the husband to whom she is unfaithful. She is only too fortunate if she does not become enamoured of some contemptible being.

Odette had not yet arrived at this total obliteration of moral sense; she deplored her sin, but she had left off trying to struggle against an inclination which was stronger than her will; she let herself go without troubling about the consequences of this dangerous connection. When Jacques occasionally talked seriously to her she closed his mouth with kisses. And he was only too ready to forget the future in order to enjoy the present.

At this very moment even, when he was dreading an immediate catastrophe, he trembled with pleasure on thinking that he was going to see her again, to fold her in his arms, to exchange caresses and confidences with her. Danger would increase tenfold their transports, and he would be able at last to explain to his adored mistress what had passed since their adventure in Notre-Dame; to inform her that they had an enemy, that they were walking in the midst of ambushes, and take measures with her so as not to fall into them. It was coming, this interview which he so ardently longed for, and which he would have

had so much difficulty in procuring at her house, in a drawing-room crowded with callers. It would take place under vexatious circumstances, since it might be interrupted by Monsieur de Malverne; but Saint-Briac had already laid his plans to avoid an accident. He said to himself:

"All will be well, provided she arrives first. Odette once inside, Hugues can come and ring. I shall put her in one of the rooms which look into the courtyard. I shall tell her to lock herself in, and to listen to what passes in the drawing-room; then I shall go and open the door to Hugues. We shall have an explanation together, which she will hear through the partition. However furious he is, he will not go so far as to burst open the door, and, besides, I shall be there to restrain him. Whilst I am parleying with him, Odette will open the window and jump down into the courtyard; it's not far—two yards—and grass right up to the wall. No one will see her; there are only two other lodgers in the house, and they are away in the country. She will make her escape by the gate, and I shall prevent Hugues from going to the window; I shall prolong the conversation, and when Odette has had time to escape I shall show him my bedroom and all the other rooms, one after the other, and he will be obliged to admit that his wife is not here. We shall see what happens then. I suppose he will ask my pardon for having suspected me, and I shall profit by this favourable moment to ask him to show me the anonymous letter he must have received. If, as I have no doubt, it is in the same writing as the one which was sent to me, I shall know what to do, and I shall have no more reason to stand on ceremony with Monsieur de Pancorbo. I shall denounce him immediately, and I shall tell Hugues to summon Mériadec and the others; they will bring Sacha and tell him the child's history."

Saint-Briac was busy with these thoughts, without ceasing to keep a look-out on the Avenue d'Antin, and he was in the act of congratulating himself on having perfected these precautionary combinations when he saw Madame de Malverne appear at the end of the Avenue.

She was coming from the direction of the quay, closely veiled and very modestly dressed in black; but he recognised her all the same, from a considerable distance, by her figure and walk.

Lovers possess an instinct which is never at fault, and changes of dress trouble them but little. In this respect they are a match for the sharpest detectives. Saint-Briac would have recognised Madame de Malverne beneath the thickest mask or the most ample domino.

"It is she," he murmured. "She has arrived before Malverne. We are saved. It only remains now to manage things cleverly."

He cast a rapid glance on both sides of the Avenue, saw nothing suspicious, ran to the front door, and held himself in readiness to open it directly Odette rang the bell.

He had not long to wait. He heard her step, and opened the door to her before she had placed her hand on the brass knob which visitors pressed in order to announce themselves. She was out of breath, having run. He took her in his arms, carried her into the drawing-room, made her sit down without saying a word to her, hastened to

close the blinds, shut the window, and came and knelt down in front of her, taking her hands in his.

She withdrew them in order to raise her veil, and said :

"I have been so frightened. I fancied I was followed. I turned round every moment, and instead of coming straight here I came by the Place de la Concorde, so I am quite done up ; let me get my breath, and forgive me for being late. It is half-past three."

"What matters it, so long as you are here !" cried the captain, covering with kisses her left hand, from which she had just taken the glove.

"It was not my fault, I assure you. I have been ready since this morning ; I was so happy when I read in the agony column the message which begins with the three first letters of my name—our countersign which I have looked for vainly for the last four days."

"And you thought that the message was from me ?"

"How should I think otherwise, and why do you ask that ?"

"Because this message is a trap which has been set for us. I should have avoided making an appointment here, after what passed the other day."

"A trap !" replied Madame de Malverne, springing up. "Who could have done it ?"

"A wretch who has found out our secret, and who wants to be avenged on me."

"Avenged ?—how ?"

"By writing to your husband to tell him that you are my mistress, and that if he comes to my house between three and four o'clock he will find you there."

"What makes you think that ?"

"Logic. This false advertisement can have no other aim than to ruin us both, and this infernal machination would fail in its object if its author had not betrayed you to your husband, at the same moment as it drew you here."

"You knew it—since you read this lying message—and you did not warn me !"

"I opened the paper an hour ago. There was no time. But I have taken my precautions to save you. I watched for you from this window, and I made certain that Malverne is not near here yet. Now he can come ; I will let him in and detain him whilst you escape by the courtyard."

"Escape !" murmured Odette, knitting her brows.

"Yes, the window is not far from the ground, and I know no other means ; if you went out now, you would run the risk of meeting him, for he may arrive at any moment."

"And if I prefer to stay ?"

"You can't think of such a thing !"

"You are an intimate friend of ours. I have surely the right to call upon my husband's best friend."

"You forget the fresh situation in which fatality has placed us. You forget that I was arrested after our unfortunate visit to Notre-Dame. The reason Malverne released me was because I swore to him that I had ascended the towers with a married woman who was my mistress ; I

refused to give her name, I refused with a persistence which must have appeared strange to him. An anonymous traitor has just written and told him that this woman—is yourself, and you think he will doubt it! when everything goes to prove it, and when my relations with you explain so clearly the stubbornness with which I refused to complete the confession which I was obliged to make to clear myself from the charge of murder. He would have to be blind, and you know how acute he is. Even supposing that he neglected to verify to-day this accusation which so nearly concerns him, the danger would remain the same. The man who has betrayed us is the murderer of the unfortunate countess. I know who he is, and he is aware that I know it. I do not know how he discovered our secret, but he has us in his power, and he will not spare us. If I have not handed him over to the law, it is because we are at his mercy; he would publish abroad what he has just written to your husband.”

Deadly pale, her face contracted and her teeth set, Madame de Malverne looked at the captain with flashing eyes.

“Yes,” said she, after a moment’s silence; “I can see that I am lost. Hugues would forgive me, perhaps; the world would not forgive me. Well, so much the better! I am tired of telling lies—tired of being his when I do not love him. I will end this odious existence—regain my liberty—live with you alone!”

“Odette!” cried Saint-Briac, terrified at so much violence.

“Yes,” she continued, in a ringing voice; “live with you whom I adore, and live so in the eyes of the world, as if I were a widow.”

“He has been my friend; I cannot kill him in a duel.”

“Who talks of killing him? I want to go away—I want to leave France, never to return to it. I want to go and hide my happiness at the other end of the world. We can surely find some out-of-the-way place where he will never come to seek us. What is there to prevent us? Is our love not strong enough to console us for losing the esteem of those whose opinion is a matter of indifference to us? I am ready to follow you anywhere, and I will not wait. I have waited too long already. I should die with anguish. When shall we start?”

And as the captain, dumbfounded by this unexpected outburst, did not immediately reply:

“You are silent! You hesitate! You who have told me so many times that you cursed this marriage to which I submitted because you were not here, and because I did not know whether I should ever see you again!”

“I curse it still, but——”

“But you are satisfied with this semblance of happiness which does not satisfy me, because I wish to be yours, and yours only. Have the courage to say that you do not love me, that you have never loved me.”

“Silence!” cried Saint-Briac, seizing his mistress’s charming head in both his hands, and pressing his lips to hers.

“No, no, you lie; you are too cowardly to sacrifice for me your own peace of mind, to brave the opinion of the world in which you enjoy yourself; let me go alone, since you are afraid, since you prefer breaking my heart to losing a friend. He is worth more than you, for if he knew that you were my lover, he would kill us both.”

Almost beside himself with transport, Saint-Briac would most likely have said, "Let us go," when he heard a violent ring at the bell.

"It is he," he said, lowering his voice; "hide yourself here, in this room, and when you hear his voice, fly in the way which I told you of."

"No!" said Odette firmly, "I shall stay here unless you promise to go with me."

Once more the bell rang with redoubled force.

"Do you want to be ruined?" cried Saint-Briac.

"I want to die, and I hope he will kill me," replied Madame de Malverne. "I shall begin by telling him that I am your mistress."

"Die! and you were talking just now of living with me!"

"That is my most ardent wish. Swear that we shall fly together, and I will obey you."

The captain, having exhausted all arguments, swore, and Odette allowed herself to be pushed into the next room, leaving her lover with these words:

"I yield because you have sworn. But I shall not leave this house. I will know whether this is not a woman who is coming."

It only needed the belief that his mistress was about to make a display of her jealousy to complete Saint-Briac's misery. He was in no humour to justify himself, and he had not the time to do so. He closed the door of the room quickly, and had at least the satisfaction of hearing the sharp click of the bolt which Odette pushed inside. The bell rang again, and this time it was a veritable peal.

"If I delayed longer, he would burst the door in," murmured the captain, preparing to face the enemy. And he cried out in a tone of command:

"Who the devil's there? Do you want to pull my bell down?"

He addressed this to Malverne, whom he expected to find furiously dragging at the handle which put the ringing apparatus in motion. But it was not Malverne, and Saint-Briac started with surprise on finding himself face-to-face with a woman clothed in black and veiled like Odette.

"Excuse me, madame," he stammered, without making room for his unknown visitor to pass; "you have made a mistake, no doubt."

"No, I have not made a mistake," she replied; "I intended to come here, and you will not doubt it when you see my face."

She lifted her veil, and the captain cried:

"You here!"

"Yes, I—and I must speak to you at once."

"I must ask you to excuse me, but it is impossible for me to admit you just now. I am not alone."

"I know it; there is—a lady here. Thank God! I am in time."

"What do you mean?"

"I have come to save her."

"Save her!" repeated Saint-Briac, stupefied.

"Yes, let me in. If we remain here we shall be surprised. He is coming—you have not a moment to lose—and I shall not detain you long. But it is absolutely necessary that I should tell you what has passed,"

Saint-Briac understood at last that Rose Verdière had brought him important news which concerned Madame de Malverne. How had Rose learnt this news? He could find no explanation of it at present, but he could not send the messenger away without hearing it, nor prolong an interview with her at the door of his rooms, in an open corridor into which Odette's husband might burst at any moment.

"Come in," said he, standing aside; "come in quickly."

The Angel of the chimes did not wait to be asked twice, and the captain showed her into the drawing-room which Madame de Malverne had just left—Madame de Malverne, who was no doubt listening on the other side of the partition.

"Speak now," said he quickly; "speak, and do not be afraid of raising your voice."

Rose, rather astonished at first at this remark, guessed almost immediately that the lady was in the next room, and that Monsieur de Saint-Briac wished not only that she should hear a female voice, but also the conversation, which would explain to her why her lover had received a young girl into his house, and would obviate all jealousy. A man would probably not have been so quick-witted, but to Rose Verdière a nod was as good as a wink.

"Sir," she began, in a sufficiently loud voice, "we hardly know one another, but you are interested, as is also Monsieur de Mériadec, in a child whom a villain has made an orphan. That is a bond between us, and the persecutor of this child has formed an abominable plan against you. I was sitting in the square, at the foot of the tower of Saint-Jacques; two men were talking near me, they did not notice that I was within earshot, they spoke of you and of Sacha; one of them said that he had just given a letter to the husband of a lady whom—whom you love——"

"To inform him that his wife is at my house at the present moment! I had guessed it. Did he mention the name——"

"Of the husband? No, sir. I thought there was a question of a magistrate—it mattered little to me, as far as that went; what did matter was to warn you of the danger. I took a cab, and I came—I trembled to arrive too late; the wretches said that the gentleman would be here at half-past three."

"I expect him. My precautions are taken. He will find no one here."

"Then, this lady is—gone already?"

"No. She will not go until he is in this room. In this way she will not risk meeting him at the door or in the street."

"And if he were to meet me?"

"That would not hurt you. He does not know you."

"How could he know me? He is a gentleman, I suppose, and I am only a poor work-girl."

An idea had just struck Saint-Briac, and, at the same time, a doubt which he wanted to clear up.

"You have not yet been examined by the magistrate as to the murder in the towers?" he asked eagerly.

"Neither myself, nor Monsieur de Mériadec, nor the two gentlemen whom you saw in the Rue Cassette. But no doubt we shall be."

"It is sufficient that you have not been so as yet," replied the captain.

He took good care not to tell Rose that the magistrate who would summon her, her and her friends, was exactly the husband he feared. And he said to himself :

"If he were to see her leaving my house, he would not know who she is ; if, later, when she is called into his room, he remembers having seen her at the door of my house, and if he asks what she was doing there, she will have the presence of mind to reply that she came to speak to me of the crime."

"Your rooms have two outlets, then ?" asked Rose, who had not understood the drift of the captain's question.

"Of which one is by the windows which open on to the court-yard. This is the ground floor, and——"

The bell rang again, and Saint-Briac said :

"This time it is he."

"What shall I do ?" stammered the young girl, who had grown pale on hearing the ring.

The captain hesitated an instant ; then, making up his mind :

"I don't want him to surprise you here," said he, in a decided voice ; "I know I can trust in you, and the person who is in there will not be surprised to see you, for she has heard us, and she knows what to do. When she has gone, you will be at liberty to use the same means of escape. Come in here."

He opened a door ; not the one which Madame de Malverne had bolted ; but the room which she occupied communicated with the one into which Saint-Briac pushed Rose Verdière, saying as he did so :

"I shall see you to-morrow, at Monsieur de Mériadec's."

After having locked her in and taken out the key, which he put in his pocket, Saint-Briac listened a moment and heard no sound on the other side of the partition. He concluded from that that Rose and Odette, grasping both of them the situation, had come to an agreement without speaking, and that they would fly when the proper moment came. The ring had not been repeated, and it might possibly not be Monsieur de Malverne after all ; but, however that might be, he must open the door, and the captain, who had recovered his self-possession, thought at once of something to keep him in countenance, in order to divert the husband's suspicions, if it were he. When he was at home alone the captain preferred smoking a pipe. He had the presence of mind to light one which he found already filled on the table in the smoking-room adjoining the drawing-room, and it was with this accessory between his teeth that he approached the door. Just as he arrived there, some one rang again, but not violently, almost timidly.

"It is some tradesman," said Saint-Briac to himself ; "unless it is a trick on the part of Malverne, coming in like a lamb instead of bursting in like a lion."

He opened the door, saw that it was he, and said, in the most natural voice that he could command :

"Hallo ! you here ! Deuce take me if I expected you to-day. I thought you were at the Palais."

"I have just come from there," replied the magistrate with calmness, a calmness which was only on the surface, for his face did not wear its usual expression :

"Come in," said Saint-Briac, "you are surprised to see me open the door myself ; would you believe that both my servants have gone out ? I was about to do the same, and if you had arrived half-an-hour later, you would have found my oak sported. I was only waiting to finish this pipe before dressing."

And after having shown Monsieur de Malverne into the drawing-room, he continued :

"You don't smoke pipes now. Your greatness compels you to be a looker-on, since you have been made a magistrate. And besides, your wife hates the smell of tobacco. But you don't mind my finishing this pipe ?"

All this was said in a careless tone, and the captain was surprised at his own acting ; but he did not play his part without remorse, for he was ashamed of it. This was the first time that he had been obliged to lower himself to trifle with the friend whom he was deceiving ; and never had he so bitterly felt his despicable position. He thought to himself, "I am acting infamously. I am no longer a gentleman, and if Hugues is not taken in by my lies, he will have the right to spit in my face."

Hugues did not seem to be convinced. Instead of seating himself in the easy chair which Jacques pushed towards him, he remained standing, his hat on his head, and his eyes fixed on the two doors.

"Whatever is the matter, my dear fellow ?" asked the captain, whom necessity forced to maintain his gay carelessness to the last. "Has any misfortune happened to you ? Ah ! I can guess. You are not happy because the Notre-Dame case is not going on well. The witnesses have told you nothing fresh."

"I have not examined any," said Monsicur de Malverne absently. "They are only summoned for to-morrow. You are all alone here now ?"

"You can see that ; if you have something confidential to say, you can speak."

And, as the magistrate was silent, he added :

"You hesitate ! It is something serious, then ?"

"Very serious," said Odette's husband at last.

"An additional reason for explaining yourself at once."

"Listen, Jacques ; you are my oldest and most intimate friend. Until to-day there has never been a cloud between us. I have the most absolute confidence in you."

"It is mutual."

"I do not doubt it. Well, judge of my feelings when I received a horrible denunciation of you."

"Good heavens !" cried the captain ironically. "And of what the devil am I accused ? Is it once more of having thrown that unfortunate woman from the south tower ?"

"If you were only accused of that, I should not have left my room in order to hurry here. I am certain now that the woman who ascended the tower of Notre-Dame with you is alive."

"Well; and then?" asked Saint-Briac, affecting to smile.

"I did not doubt it," continued Monsieur de Malverne; "but if I had ever done so, I should be in a position to-day to convince myself that she exists, for I have just been told who she is."

"Here it comes," thought the captain; "I must watch myself." And he said, shrugging his shoulders:

"I think some one has been making fun of you, for I am almost certain that no one saw her. No matter; tell me her name, and if you have been told the truth, I will not contradict the person who has informed you. You will possess then a secret which I should have preferred to keep, but I know that you are incapable of abusing it."

Odette's husband handed him a letter which he held folded in his left hand.

"Read!" said he in a hoarse voice.

It was the decisive moment. Saint-Briac felt a chill run through him, but he extricated himself from the difficulty by his coolness.

"Ah! this is infamous!" he cried, after having rapidly glanced at the first few lines. "What rascal has invented this abominable calumny? You did not believe it, I hope. But when I find out the wretch——"

"Read to the end."

Saint-Briac turned over the page quickly and said:

"I knew it! he has not signed his name—and you know how an honourable man should treat an anonymous letter."

"I should not take any notice of it if it did not contain a precise statement; read, I tell you again."

The captain would willingly have dispensed with this, but he could not refuse, and he began to decipher—scanning each word—the fine handwriting which he at once recognised as having seen two days before, the handwriting of Monsieur de Pancorbo.

"The lady who ascended the tower of Notre-Dame with Monsieur de Saint-Briac was your wife, and if you wish for a proof of it, go this afternoon, between three and four o'clock, to the gallant captain's house; you will find Madame de Malverne there. For the last six months she has been the mistress of this man who calls himself your friend."

It was clear and precise like a mathematical theorem. It was impossible to screen one's self from such a damning accusation. It must be refuted on the spot, and refuted by proofs.

Saint-Briac tried, nevertheless, to prolong the scene. Hugues was evidently about to insist that the captain should show him that there was no one hidden in the rooms, and the captain was anxious to give Odette time to escape by the way which he had pointed out to her. He hoped, too, that Rose Verdière would get out of the window as well, and he had in his mind, as an allowable theatrical effect, at the end of the conversation which had just begun, a thorough search of the rooms, which the husband would find empty.

"So," said he, with a heart-broken look, "you believed this infamous letter, and you have come to verify the odious allegations of a rascal who is unknown to you. You really deserve that I should allow you to believe them, when it would be easy to convince you that the

accuser lies. What kind of opinion have you of your wife and of me, to come here, like a commissary of police charged with catching a criminal red-handed?"

Saint-Briac had approached the door and raised his voice, so as to be heard by Odette, if she were still there.

"I believe what I have seen," said the husband coldly. "A lady came in here a few moments before myself, and this lady—was my wife."

This statement caused Saint-Briac to go pale, and he could only stammer:

"It is impossible. You dreamt it. Anger impaired your senses and your sight."

"I say that a woman came in here," continued Monsieur de Malverne, with a calmness more terrible than an outburst of rage; "a woman dressed in black, whom I recognised perfectly, although she had a veil over her face. I had just got out of a cab at the Rond Point of the Champs-Élysées, and I was entering the Avenue d'Antin when I saw her; she was approaching hastily from the direction of the quay, and keeping close to the houses; when she arrived at your entrance-gate she turned suddenly and disappeared under the arch."

"You were mistaken, no doubt; but if such were the case, it would be no proof that she entered my rooms. I am not the only occupant of this house. And it would be still less proof that it was Madame de Malverne. She is no doubt at home at this very moment, and if you wish to dispel these visions which are weighing on your mind, you have only to accompany me to your house. I am certain that we shall find her there pouring out tea for her friends—it's her day—and I should have gone myself if you had not come and prevented me."

"And I, for my part, am certain that she is here, unless she has already had time to escape."

"How? My rooms have no secret exit."

"They are on the ground floor, and there are windows opening into the court-yard."

Saint-Briac trembled. This terrible husband had guessed the truth, and Odette's lover began to fear that he would not be able to escape from the position in which the imprudence of his mistress had placed him. He tried to do so, however, by a change of tone.

"To the devil with your absurd suspicions!" he cried, emphasising this crushing answer with a disdainful gesture. "Since you will not be convinced, I shall try no more to convince you. Believe what you like, and leave me in peace."

"Your insults are nothing to me, sir," replied Hugues, without departing from his haughty coolness. "You will expiate them along with the rest, for I shall do you the honour to fight you, and I sincerely hope to kill you. But I want your accomplice, and I will not leave this house without her."

"Then," said the captain, now really angry, "do you fancy that if there were really a woman there, I should hand her over to you? What do you take me for, sir?"

"I might reply, for a traitor; for you have destroyed by an odious act of treason a friendship of twenty years; but I have not to deal

with you at this moment. "You say you are alone here. Prove it by opening that door."

"I should have done so already if you had not spoken to me in a manner which I will not tolerate. And why should I show you that the next room is empty? You say that the person who took refuge there has jumped out of the window. Let us make an end of this, I pray. This ridiculous scene has lasted too long already. We can kill one another when you please; I ask nothing better. But this is my house, and I beg you to leave it."

"Not before having torn your accomplice from the room where she is hiding."

Monsieur de Malverne was evidently preparing to kick the door in, and the exasperated Saint-Briac was about to clutch his throat, when a sound of overturned chairs prevented them from proceeding to violence.

The sound came from the bed-room, and the captain asked himself if Odette was still there.

"Do you still persist in maintaining that there is no one there?" asked Hugues.

"No; but I forbid you to enter; and I swear that you shall not pass," retorted Saint-Briac, flinging his pipe, which he still held in his hand, to the other end of the room. It only remained for the two friends to collar one another like two roughs; but this deplorable extremity was spared them. The door, threatened by one and defended by the other, suddenly opened, and Rose Verdière appeared to view, her face uncovered.

Thunderstruck, Monsieur de Malverne started back. Saint-Briac, much less surprised, remained silent. He was asking himself the question: "What will she say?"

The young girl entered the room, her head erect, and, addressing Odette's husband, said:

"It was I, sir, whom you saw coming from the quay and entering this house. I believe I saw you at the other end of the avenue. You mentioned just now a woman dressed in black, and wearing a veil. Do you recognise me?"

"Yes," murmured Malverne; "I believe it was you, and yet——"

"You are doubtful still. You do not understand why Monsieur de Saint-Briac persistently denied that there was a woman here. But if he had admitted it, you would have insisted on his producing her, and he would have stubbornly refused, because I should be ruined if it were known that I was his mistress."

"You!" cried the husband, who could hardly realise such a happy conclusion.

The captain, on hearing this heroic falsehood, had quickly assumed a suitable expression; but he remained mute, admiring the devotion and intelligence of this girl, who, in order to save a woman of whom she could hardly entertain a very high opinion, bravely took upon herself a fault which she had never committed.

"Yes, sir," said Rose, without faltering; "I am his mistress, and I would not suffer that he should have another. Therefore, you can dispense with searching this room. The woman whom you seek is not

there. I do not know who you are, and if I hid myself when you rang, it was because I, too, had my good name to consider, and I do not wish Monsieur de Saint-Briac's friends to see me. I was about to get out of the window when I heard through the partition your outburst of passion, and I thought it best to stay. It has cost me a great deal to show myself to you; but now that you have seen me, you will no longer accuse an innocent woman because she has the misfortune to resemble me at a distance. And besides, I believe I am dealing with an honourable man, and I am certain that, if ever you see me again, you will forget having seen me here."

Upon the conclusion of this speech, which a well-bred lady would not have been ashamed of, the daughter of the late keeper of the towers bowed distantly to Monsieur de Malverne, and walked out of the room, after having extended her hand to the captain, who imprinted on it a grateful kiss, and who refrained from escorting to the door the generous girl to whom Odette owed her salvation.

Jacques remained face to face with the husband, who was looking very sheepish, and said to him gently:

"Are you still angry with me? Do you see at last that you wrongly suspected your wife and your friend?"

Hugues opened his arms, and Odette's lover had the courage not to shrink from this greeting which he hardly deserved. When a man has once left the narrow way, he continues to the end in the path of falsehood.

"Forgive me," murmured Monsieur de Malverne; "this infamous letter has upset me."

"Why? Did you not guess from whence it came?"

"I cannot guess now."

"Then you have forgotten what Pancorbo said to us at the club?"

"What! it is he who——"

"Remember that, having accosted me on some trifling subject, he told me all at once that he had seen me the day before crossing the precincts of Notre-Dame between two policemen. Remember that the idea at once struck you that this well-informed man was perhaps the murderer?"

"That's true," murmured Monsieur de Malverne. "I recollect, too, that the man's strange statement seemed to me like a vague threat."

"And you were not taken in by it," added the captain. "It was a kind of warning, as if he had said, 'Drop the Notre-Dame case; if not, I will do you both a bad turn.' You saw this so clearly that you were to have asked at the Spanish Embassy for information about the so-called Marquis de Pancorbo."

"And I neglected to do so—but there is still time."

"No, I think it is too late. He did not appear at the club yesterday evening, and he is no longer at the Hôtel Continental. This disappearance proves abundantly that he is guilty. Now, shall I explain to you the plan which he devised, and which he has just begun to put into execution? This is it: there is no doubt that, from the top of the tower where he had gone with his victim, he saw me on the gallery with a woman whom he failed to recognise, owing to the fact that he

had never seen her before ; but he recognised me—me whom he saw every day at the baccarat table. He would have allowed me to be convicted, and when, the next day, he met me at the club, he said to himself : ‘ This man may have seen me up there, and he might take it into his head to tell his friend, the magistrate ; I must prevent him from speaking.’ And he has carried the thing on to the end. He informed me first that he was present when I was arrested, and he made me feel that it only rested with him to publish this misadventure which I had every interest in concealing.”

“ And I told you not to take any notice of this threat.”

“ And I followed your advice so carefully that after you had gone, having seen him leave the club accompanied by the individual who addressed him in our presence in the Champs-Élysées, I amused myself by watching both of them. They escaped me, and on returning home I found an anonymous letter, the writer of which warned me that he knew my mistress’s name, and that if I continued to interfere with him he would betray me to her husband.”

“ You have this letter ? ”

“ No, I burnt it, but I affirm that it was the same handwriting as this one. Let me finish. In the first one there was no mention of you. The arch-rogue did not give the name—and for a good reason—of the woman on whom he threatened to take vengeance. He thought that that would be sufficient to frighten me. Now, the next day I went to see one of the witnesses whom you summoned, and whom you will doubtless examine, one of these days.”

“ To-morrow, without further delay,” interrupted the magistrate.

“ You will do well,” said the captain, who thought quite otherwise, for the coming appearance of Rose Verdière gave him great anxiety. “ I went, then, to the Baron de Mériadec’s, whose address you gave me. Pancorbo must have known of this step—I am certain that he has had me watched for the last two days—and he concluded from it that I was hatching something against him. It was then that he thought of a new combination, or rather, of an improvement on the first. He knows that you are married, that I am your intimate friend, that your wife is young and pretty. He said to himself, ‘ If I could only make the magistrate believe that Saint-Briac is Madame de Malverne’s lover, the men would perhaps kill one another, and I should be rid of my most dangerous enemies. An anonymous letter will serve my purpose.’ ”

On hearing these deductions which his friend hazarded Monsieur de Malverne knit his brows, and did not seem satisfied.

“ I do not follow your reasoning,” he said coldly. “ These machinations would have turned against himself. And he would not have said that I should surprise my wife at your house, knowing that I should not find her here.”

“ You don’t know the villains of the kind to which this rascal belongs. They calumniate at any price, because a calumny always leaves its traces. He succeeded in troubling your peace of mind for the time being. He has sowed the seeds of mistrust between us. And, besides, it was against me that the blow was directed. It was as if he had said to me, ‘ If you persist in interfering in my busi-

ness, you will get yourself into terrible trouble, of which I send you the first specimen.' And then he did not foresee that I should be in a position to clear myself completely, and on the spot, of a charge which strictly you might have thought well-founded. Just think what would have passed between us if things had happened otherwise! If you had found no one here you would perhaps have thought that your wife had been here and that you were too late. If I had refused to expose my mistress, whom I had hid in my bedroom, it would have been worse still. We should certainly have killed one another. We have already been on the point of doing so, because she did not hurry herself to appear. In order to prevent a misfortune, it was necessary that she should have intelligence and the courage to show herself, a courage rare in the position that she was placed in, for she is not of those who have nothing to lose by exposure."

"She is married, then?"

"I must beg you not to ask me any questions as to her social position. It has cost her enough already to have to show herself; we will let the matter rest there, if you please."

"There is nothing at least to prevent you from telling me whether it was she who ascended the tower of Notre-Dame with you?"

"You can think what you like about that."

"Then you refuse to answer me?"

"Absolutely, and I am surprised that you should insist. We are not in your room in the Palais, and you are not a magistrate here. You are Hugues de Malverne, my oldest friend, and now that you can no longer suspect me of having deceived you, my love affairs do not concern you, I tell you plainly."

"You are right," cried Malverne, impressed by this firm and unmistakable language."

"Would you like to search every hole and corner of my rooms?" asked the captain, smiling.

"I will not put this insult on you. I no longer accuse you, and I beg you to forget what has passed between us here. For my part, I shall remember it as a lesson; but I shall never refer to it to you, and Odette shall never know it."

"Now you are yourself again, and I hope that in future nothing will cast a shadow over our old friendship. Will you allow me to give you a piece of advice? it is, to let Monsieur de Pancorbo go and get himself hanged elsewhere."

"I cannot promise that," said Monsieur de Malverne quickly. "I am a magistrate, and I must do my duty to the end. But I engage that you shall not be mixed up in it any more. It has cost you dear already, and it is not your place to find out the truth of it."

"Don't be alarmed; I shall not bother myself about it again. You are going home, I suppose. When shall I see you again?"

"When you like. You know our house is always open to you."

They shook hands, and separated on the threshold which Odette had crossed to enter her lover's house. The time has passed when the public laughed at the husbands in Molière's plays, and of these two men, Hugues de Malverne was not the more unfortunate, for Saint-Briac,

left alone, dropped into an arm-chair on which his mistress had sat, and said with a gesture of despair :

"Ah ! the disgrace is too much ! I am disgusted at myself ; I wish the murderer would propose a duel to the death, and rid me of my life."

VIII.

ROSE VERDIÈRE had left the captain's house with death in her soul. She did not regret having sacrificed herself to save from an imminent catastrophe a man with whom she sympathised, but she hardly dared contemplate the consequences which might result from the devoted act.

She did not know the name of the husband whom she had helped to deceive, although she had heard through the partition almost the whole of the conversation between the two men. This name figured in the anonymous letter which Monsieur de Saint-Briac had read—with his eyes only ; it had not been mentioned aloud.

The few words exchanged between the husband and lover at the end of their discussion might have put the young girl on the track.

She had not heard these, because at the moment when they were spoken she was engaged in helping the guilty woman out of the window. She was ignorant, therefore, of the fact that this husband was the magistrate who had the Notre-Dame case in hand ; but she knew that he was the captain's intimate friend, and that was enough for her to dread the consequences of this adventure.

She asked herself whether this friend whose anger she had disarmed by her appearance would be satisfied by this incontestable proof of his wife's innocence ? whether, on the contrary, he would not secretly institute an inquiry with the sole aim of making certain that the captain had spoken the truth when he introduced Rose as his mistress.

A jealous man who loves deeply believes only that which he desires. He may be prompted to admit, in his first feeling of joy, a doubtful explanation, and to think better of it afterwards. Now, if Monsieur de Malverne undertook to assure himself that the captain had not lied, he must sooner or later discover who the woman was whom the latter had produced. It would only be necessary for him to watch Saint-Briac—who would be sure to visit Mériadec's house, if only to thank the Angel of the chimes—to inquire about the persons who inhabited the house in the Rue Cassette, and to come there himself on some pretext or other.

Rose shuddered at the idea of finding herself again face to face with this man, who, in order to explain the situation, would probably remind her of their meeting in Saint-Briac's rooms, and might even go so far as to talk to her of her intimate relations with the captain, and this in the presence of Mériadec whom she respected, and of Daubrac whom she loved.

She would die with shame, unless, indeed, she declared to the husband that she had acted a comedy in order to help Saint-Briac to deceive him. And she would never be able to make up her mind to betray the

lovers whom she had saved at the risk of her own reputation and peace of mind.

She blamed their conduct, for all that, with all the energy which virtue gives to a respectable girl. She could not understand how the lover could have so debased himself as to betray his intimate friend. She understood still less how his mistress could have broken her marriage vows. And if she had sacrificed herself to preserve them from the punishment which they both deserved, it was solely from a feeling of pity. She had yielded to the promptings of her heart, without calculating the significance of an act whose least ill-effect would be to expose herself to all kinds of risk.

Madame de Malverne had had no hand in the resolution which Rose had taken on the spur of the moment. They had barely exchanged a few words in the bed-room where they had met. What could they have said? Odette, who had been listening at the door, knew now that Rose had only come to the captain's house to warn him of the threatening danger.

Odette might well have thanked her; but she was in one of those positions in which a woman has not the courage to express what she feels. And Rose was afraid to add to her trouble by speaking to her. She had confined herself to pointing out the window to her, helping her to descend—just at the moment when her husband was assuming an aggressive tone towards Jacques—and afterwards to quietly closing this window, which might have appeared suspicious to Monsieur de Malverne if she had left it open.

After this Rose had assumed a listening attitude at the door. She had followed with anguish the stormy discussion between the two friends, always hoping that the husband would end by being pacified and leaving the place. But the quarrel had soon reached its most violent height, and, on hearing the exasperated husband speak of bursting in the door, Rose had guessed that Monsieur de Saint-Briac would put himself in his path, and that to prevent them from proceeding to actual violence it was necessary that she should show herself.

She had done so, and, inspired by the gravity of the position, she had improvised an explanatory speech, which, under any other circumstances, she would not have had the wit to invent. After which she had gone out with all the honours of war; that is to say, with the conviction of having reconciled the two adversaries.

What had passed between them after she had gone? She knew not; but it was not the time to think about that, and besides, she imagined that the captain would not leave her long without news.

Her fears now took another direction. She thought of the child whom those wretches had proposed to suppress, as they called it in their frightful language.

She had thought that her best course was to hurry to Saint-Briac's help first, and she had done well, for she had been within an ace of arriving too late. Sacha, well looked after by Mériadec, could wait. And yet she was not easy in her mind. The two villains whose conversation she had overheard at the foot of the tower of Saint-Jacques had just given a proof of what they were capable, and it was certainly

more difficult to prepare the ambush in the Avenue d'Antin than to obtain an entry into a detached house in the Rue Cassette.

These men were quite capable of inventing some trick by which the baron would be deceived. He was brave and good, but he had all the defects of his good qualities. His bravery verged on rashness and his goodness on simplicity; in this way, that, judging others by himself, he could not believe in evil. Sacha was very unlike him; but Sacha was a proud, intractable young savage, a badly-tamed bird, whose only endeavour was to escape from his cage, and who, if he once took flight, would not be able to return to it, since he would not be able to find his way about a town with which he was quite unacquainted.

Both protector and protected had great need of a discreet person to aid them by presence and advice. Rose, in spite of her youth, had all that was necessary for the fulfilment of these restraining functions, and she was anxious to rejoin them. On getting into the street she had walked towards the river. On the quay she got into the cab which she had left there, and drove to the Rue Cassette.

On the way her uneasiness with regard to Sacha became less, and her mind returned to the scenes which had just taken place at the captain's. She asked herself whether she should relate them to Mériadec, and, having thought it well over, she decided not to refer to them.

It happened by chance that she had chosen a good horse, and in less than twenty minutes she arrived at the Rue de Rennes, where she got out, in order to avoid attracting, by the noise of a cab going at full speed, the attention of the baron's peaceful neighbours.

She entered the Rue Cassette, solitary as usual, and walked rapidly towards Mériadec's house.

This house which Rose Verdière had inhabited for the last two days, and where she was already happy, wore its accustomed aspect—an aspect absolutely devoid of cheerfulness.

Separated from the street by a long wall pierced with a small door, it only exhibited two windows, both in the first floor, and each one of which lighted one of the wings on either side of the main building, which stood at the far end of the court-yard. The first one, on approaching from the Rue de Rennes, was that of Rose's bedroom; having shut it before she went out, she was surprised to see it open. The other one, belonging to the baron's bedroom, was closed, although it was a splendid day and Mériadec was very fond of fresh air.

"That's odd," she said to herself, on noticing this double change. It needed no more than this for her uneasiness to take possession of her again, and her heart beat loudly as she approached the door. She had no key, and she feared to find it locked; but she had only to turn the handle to enter.

"I am silly to worry myself," she thought. "If the baron had gone out with Sacha he would not have left his house at the mercy of the first comer, the more so that his housekeeper is never here at this hour of the day. I shall find him upstairs, deep in Don Quixote, and extolling his hero to Sacha, who only appreciates the pictures in the book."

She entered the staircase on her right, ran quickly up the stairs, entered the room where she had breakfasted, saw no one there, and went into the next room where she had left Mériadec explaining why the last of the knights-errant rushed, lance in rest, against a windmill.

The folio remained open, but master and pupil were there no longer. Rose retraced her steps, went into the bedroom, which was empty, and, turning once more, went on to the workroom.

No one there; Mériadec must have gone out; and his absence, after all, had nothing extraordinary in it, for during the afternoon he very frequently went and indulged in reveries at the Luxembourg.

"He must have taken Sacha with him," thought Rose, "and I am sure that he will not lose him on the way. But I should like to see them both again."

She did not fancy that they would be long away, and whilst she was waiting for them she could do nothing better than set to work again.

She had brought back from the shop in the Rue de Rivoli a very important and pressing order, and she had no time to spare if she wished to complete the work—which was to be well paid—by the time fixed upon.

So she took up her tools and tried to fashion the wreath of corn-flowers which formed part of the work entrusted to her hands.

Unfortunately, her thoughts were elsewhere, and her fingers performed their task but badly. The incidents of the day were crowding upon her mind, and her imagination was busy with their consequences. She fancied that she could still see the husband's severe face, his blazing eyes, his threatening attitude; the captain's martial countenance, and the pale features of the guilty woman. It seemed to her that she could hear the irritated voices of the two men, those voices which made her shudder in the bedroom, where she was holding herself in readiness to intervene.

Then she called up the image of Daubrac: she saw him in her thoughts, with his brown face, his black, curly hair, his well-built figure and brisk step. She recalled even his most insignificant remarks, and she could have repeated word for word the last conversation she had had with him. He had gone, telling her pretty clearly that he loved her; but how did he love her, and to what would this love, which she, too, shared, lead her? Daubrac had not explained his intentions, and poor Rose had every reason to believe that he did not aspire to her hand.

Marriage was not made for house-surgeons. They have no time to think of it, and sufficient attractions exist for them in the Latin Quarter. It is only much later in life that they think of settling down, and then they look out for a dowry. Why should Daubrac be an exception to the rule, common to all young men, to work in order to win a good position in this world where money reigns and governs? Rose could not reasonably expect that he would sacrifice his future for her, and she reproached herself for not having cut him short at his first attempted declaration. She promised herself that she would be more reserved in future; but girls who are in love never keep these vows, and, without confessing it to herself, she was madly in love with this

honest and handsome fellow, whom a strange hazard had caused to be associated with her life.

It was no longer in her power to keep out of his way, now that she was living at Mériadec's house, since he came there every day ; and even if she had determined to move in order to avoid him, she would still have met him at the hospital where she went every morning to see her father, who was a long way from being cured.

She had reached this point in her reflections, and the wreath of corn-flowers was progressing but slowly, when, on raising her eyes, she saw Mériadec in the court-yard, walking towards the staircase in the right wing, and almost immediately disappearing in it.

Rose was working at the window, and Mériadec must have seen her.

"God be praised," she said to herself, rising quickly, "he has brought back Sacha."

She had not seen the child ; but she concluded that the baron had made him go on before him, and that she should find him in the library.

She ran thither, but only found Mériadec, who cried :

"What ! you here, mademoiselle !"

"I have been here for the last quarter of an hour," replied the young girl, with a certain amount of embarrassment. "I was away much too long, I know, but it wasn't my fault, and——"

"Oh, I am not blaming you, and, as you are here, all is well ; but I was afraid I should not see you again."

"Why ?"

"Because I did not meet you at the place you mentioned. I searched all over the gardens of the Tuileries. You were not there."

"In the gardens of the Tuileries ! But I never went there."

"But you wrote and told me that you would await me there."

"I !"

"Certainly. Look."

Mériadec took a letter from his pocket and handed it to the Angel of the chimes, who cried :

"This letter is not from me ?"

"What do you say ?"

"The truth, sir. Who gave it to you ?"

"A man dressed like a commissionaire. He told me that it was very urgent, and the person would await me at the foot of the chestnut tree of the Twentieth of March."

"Another trap," murmured Rose, dumbfounded at this fresh blow.

"Another !" repeated Mériadec. "Then you, too, have had one set for you before ?"

"Not for me. But the wretch who sent you this letter knew probably that you did not know my handwriting, and he invented this method to get you away from here."

"With what object ?"

"Where is Sacha ?" asked Rose abruptly.

"Sacha is here," replied Mériadec. "I could not take him with me. I thought that you were in danger, and I did not wish to expose the child to it."

"Then, you left him alone in this house?" cried Rose.

"I was obliged to do so. But I took care to shut him up, in case he should take it into his head to go out."

"Where did you shut him up?"

"In his bedroom, and he did not know of it. After having looked at the great books which I was explaining to him, he wanted to go to sleep, and I laid him on his bed, where he went off directly. A quarter of an hour afterwards the commissioner brought me the letter which I have just shown you. I dismissed him, and as I did not like to leave Sacha at the mercy of any one who might come in, I locked both the doors of the room where he is sleeping. He did not hear me, and he was sleeping so soundly that he has not awoken yet."

"Are you certain of that?"

"No, because I have not been to see him yet, but I believe so, and besides, we can go and see for ourselves. Come with me, my dear Rose."

"Look!" said she, leading Mériadec to the window which looked out on the court-yard.

And she pointed to a rope ladder fastened to the window of Sacha's bedroom.

"Ah! good heavens!" cried Mériadec in consternation. "The unfortunate child has escaped!"

"Say rather that he has been taken away. Where could he have got that ladder?"

"I cannot say. But I can affirm that he has not let himself be taken away. He would have defended himself, he would have called for help; one cannot carry away a child of nine like a nurse carries a baby."

"Oh, they would have taken good care not to use violence. They would have resorted to a proceeding which is familiar to them. They persuaded him that one of us had sent for him."

"Sacha would not have believed it."

"You believed it, and you are not the only one who has been taken in to-day by this clumsy artifice. Besides, Sacha would ask for nothing better than to run about the town. He probably replied that he was shut up in his room; they threw this ladder to him, and he hastened to profit by it to escape, delighted to play you a trick, because he was vexed with you for having shut him up."

"Yes," murmured Mériadec, "it may have happened like that, unless——"

And without finishing the sentence he ran to the door. The key remained in the lock outside. Mériadec turned it softly, and entered on tip-toe.

Rose Verdière followed him, walking quietly.

The bed was at the far end of the room, a little iron bed, with drawn curtains.

Mériadec gently drew them aside, placed his finger on his lip, and motioned to the Angel of the chimes to approach. The child was lying on his right side, his face turned towards the wall and his left arm folded above his head. He did not stir, and Mériadec said in a whisper to Rose, "We will not wake him. He is sleeping so soundly."

They left the room as they had entered it, and walked to the other end of the workroom, so as to talk without disturbing the child.

"What a strange sleep!" said the young girl, only half at her ease.

"The way in which we used to sleep when we were his age," replied the baron, rubbing his hands. "You see, my dear Rose, that you were alarmed without a cause."

"I admit that; and yet—that open window——"

"Opened by me at Sacha's request. He was too hot, and the room is so small that I thought it best to let him have some air."

"But the ladder——"

"I did not fasten it there, I can assure you."

"Who, then?"

"Upon my word, I don't know. The child will tell us when he wakes. It matters little, since he is safe and sound. It is, perhaps, an idea of our friend Fabreguette's."

"What?"

"Why, yes. He did not come to breakfast this morning. He wanted to make up for lost time this afternoon, and finding no one here, he took it into his head to scale the bedroom window for a lark."

"That's very improbable. But, once again, the ladder? You are not going to tell me that he brought it."

"Who knows? Fabreguette is an original character, and would be pleased to walk about with such a thing. Did he not boast yesterday of finding the house where Sacha slept on arriving in Paris, and of obtaining access to it by means only known to himself? Why should not he have succeeded by means of this rope ladder? He came to tell us of his success, and to show us how he effected it. We were not here. He has left his portable ladder fastened to the window, in order to prove that his system enables him to enter people's houses in spite of themselves. And he will come here again before the end of the day."

Rose did not appear satisfied by this reasoning, and Mériadec tried a fresh argument.

"You must admit," said he, "that if the ladder had been brought here by our enemies, I know not with what evil design, they would not have left it there to betray them."

"That is true," said the young girl. "But why did they get you away from home, just at the moment when I was not there?"

"Good gracious, Rose, I don't profess to explain everything. For the last few days we have lived in the midst of extraordinary events; we go from one surprise to another, and we cannot yet foresee the end of the drama which is being played around us."

"And by us," said Rose softly, who was thinking of her adventure at Monsieur de Saint-Briac's.

"Let us be satisfied, for the time being, with being free from anxiety on Sacha's account."

"I am still anxious."

"What! Even after having seen him?"

"I shall not rest contented until Sacha has spoken to me."

"That's a small matter. Just now I did not wish to disturb his sleep, but, after all, he has slept long enough, and I am anxious to ask him

what happened here after I went. It is probable that the poor child knows nothing about it. Never mind, let us go and wake him."

Rose was only too willing, and they both returned to the bedroom where nothing had moved since they had left it. They found Sacha in the same position, but this time Mériadec drew the curtains noisily and called him by name.

Receiving no answer, he leant over him and touched the hand which concealed his face.

It was icy cold.

Sacha betrayed no sign of life. His half-opened eyes were expressionless, and his swollen face was unrecognisable. His tongue was hanging out of his mouth.

"He is dead!" cried Rose.

"Murdered!" replied Mériadec.

It was a painful sight to behold, this poor child's body. The bare neck was discoloured by two purple marks, the marks of the villain's fingers who had strangled him with one hand; an enormous hand whose powerful clutch had sufficed to commit the crime.

Sacha must have been surprised whilst asleep, for his clothes were not disordered, and the bed was not disturbed. The murderer had only had to replace the body in a natural position, and to place one arm over the face, so as to make it appear that his victim was asleep.

Mériadec had been taken in by it, and Rose, who had her doubts at first, had finally believed it too.

She was weeping now; weeping silently. Great grief is dumb, and she had no strength to express hers.

Mériadec was thunderstruck.

"It is I who have killed him," said he, beating his breast. "I ought to have watched over him, and I left him defenceless."

"To hasten to my help," sobbed Rose. "I am the cause of his death."

"You could not know that the murderer would make use of your name to get me out of the house."

"No, but I knew Sacha's life was in danger, I heard two men talking about carrying him off, and, instead of hastening back here, I—"

"It is most fortunate that you did not come in; you would not have found me, and they would have killed you."

"I should not have regretted my life if I could have saved him."

"We will avenge him."

"Do not make too sure. The struggle is too unequal between us and these villains. We shall all perish in it."

"No, we have justice on our side. I wished to take its place. I bitterly regret it, and I shall tell the magistrate all that I have hidden from him hitherto. Now that Sacha is dead, I have no longer any reason for being silent. And there is not a moment to lose. A murder has been committed in my house, and this murder is only a consequence of the Notre-Dame crime. I shall hurry to the Palais at once."

"I cannot remain alone here," said Rose, averting her eyes so as not to see the body.

"Why should you not come with me? You had some connection

with the affair of the tower, and soon, to-morrow, perhaps, you will be summoned as a witness. Do not let us await that summons. If our friends were here I should ask them to go with us. Unfortunately, Fabreguette has not appeared to-day."

"We shall find Monsieur Daubrac at the hospital."

"Yes, this is the time for his second round, and the hospital is on our way. Let us go."

"Who will stay with him?" asked Rose, pointing to Sacha's poor little body.

Mériadec made a motion which signified, "He has no more need of any one." Upon this the young girl took from her bosom a bunch of violets, which she had bought on her way to the Rue de Rivoli, placed it on the child's breast, and fell on her knees at the bedside.

Whilst she prayed Mériadec shut the window, without removing the ladder, which he thought best to leave as it was, so that the law should understand how the murderer had entered.

Then he helped Rose to rise and took her into his room, after having locked the door of the death chamber and put the key in his pocket.

"Are you ready to tell the magistrate what you know?" he asked his *protégée*, who only answered by an affirmative nod.

She was loth to say "yes" plainly, because she was mentally resolving to make certain reservations.

She determined, for instance, to say nothing to the magistrate about the scene between the husband and lover. She had not mentioned it to Mériadec, and she did not wish to depart from the absolute silence to which she had pledged herself with Monsieur de Saint-Briac.

That scene, besides, had only a remote connection with the Notre-Dame crime, and none at all with Sacha's murder.

"I hope we shall find him in his room," said Mériadec. "But we have not a moment to spare. Come along quickly."

They descended the stairs hastily, and this time the baron was careful to double-lock the street door; a precaution which he would have done well to take when he went to the Tuileries to seek Rose Verdière, who was not there.

She had not kept her cab, but they engaged one which was going up the Rue de Rennes, and which quickly took them to the hospital.

Rose remained beneath the peristyle, and Mériadec was shown into the house-surgeons' room, where he found Daubrac in the act of taking off his apron. He told him shortly of Sacha's death, and proposed to him to accompany him to the Palais with Rose.

"I am willing, but I doubt whether she will be anxious to go when she has heard the sad news which I have to announce to her. Her father has just died."

"Why, every one is dying!" cried Mériadec.

"Upon my word, my dear fellow, I begin to think that we shall all perish. I have just come in from Fabreguette's. He has not been home to his garret in the Rue de la Huchette: he has not been seen there for thirty-six hours. Some accident has certainly happened to him. As for old Verdière, he has just had another fit—a terrible one. He had not time to say 'Oh!'"

"Well, if you take my advice you will not say anything about it to his daughter. She would lose her head, and would refuse to go with us. Now, I want to have done with this intolerable state of affairs to-day, and it is absolutely necessary that we should all three of us present ourselves before the magistrate at the same time. If I were to go alone the step would have much less weight. He would not take my word for it, perhaps, when I told him how and why I had taken Sacha. He would open a fresh inquiry, and there would be much time lost."

"I am of your opinion, and the more so that Sacha's murder will infallibly bring down on you the police, the law, and all its consequences. We cannot leave you to bear the brunt of it alone. I am even sorry for Fabreguette's absence and that of the captain. But there is no time to run after them, and we shall be three, at any rate, for I shall not tell this poor girl that she is an orphan. She will know it soon enough. Between ourselves," continued the doctor, putting on his hat to go out with his friend, "it is no great loss. Her father was an old drunkard, who would have been very embarrassing if she wanted to marry."

They found her beneath the peristyle, and Daubrac was not obliged to tell a falsehood, for, owing to her trouble, she forgot to ask after old Verdière.

The Palais is close at hand, and they had not time to talk much on the way. As a matter of fact, they had no great wish to do so.

At the door Mériadec got out of the cab to make inquiries, and was told that Monsieur de Malverne had left his room almost two hours ago, and that he had doubtless gone home. The usher gave his address to the baron, whom he took for a friend of the magistrate. Mériadec went back to consult Daubrac and Rose, and they unanimously decided to drive to the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. They had little idea of the effect their visit would produce.

IX.

For the last two days, Mériadec, Rose, Daubrac, and the captain had not been on beds of roses; but their ally, Jean Fabreguette, had been having a still worse time of it.

After the explanation which had ended in the sudden closing of the grating, the poor fellow had flown into a violent passion. He had rushed against the wall, plying his hands and feet, with no other result than that of bruising his flesh.

The planks, two inches thick, would have resisted axe and mattock. He did not even succeed in shaking them.

After this he began to pace his cell again, like a bear in a cage, showering blows on the walls and floor, raging, shouting and cursing.

After three quarters of an hour of this exercise he finally came to the conclusion that he would never leave this prison, unless some one came to rescue him; and worn out by the frantic efforts he had made, he threw himself on the floor. A thing happened to him then, which very frequently happens to men over-excited by a long struggle. At the

end of a hardly-fought battle, soldiers have been seen to sink down from fatigue, and sleep in spite of the roar of the cannon, the hurdling of the bullets, and the humming of the balls. It was only natural, then, that Fabreguette, having exhausted his strength, should yield to sleep in a house which was as silent as the tomb.

He lost all consciousness of existence, and if his jailer had been in the next room he might have heard him snoring. When the artist awoke, he had great difficulty in realising where he was. The pallet which served him for a bed in his attic was not much softer than the boards on which he had been sleeping, and he thought at first that he had been lying, as usual, in his own lofty garret.

"That's odd," he growled, rubbing his eyes, "it isn't light yet. Whatever time is it?"

Then, all at once, the truth dawned upon him. He sat up and tried to recall the varied incidents of his lamentable misadventure. He remembered them one by one, and began to be astonished that he had been so foolish. But soon he realised, in all its horror, the position in which he had placed himself. It was a desperate one. From whence could he expect aid?

On leaving Daubrac, he had certainly told him that he was going to the Rue Marbeuf to look for the house where Sacha had spent one night; but Daubrac did not know the house, and he would certainly not attempt to find it. Daubrac was far too much taken up with his patients, and with Rose Verdière, to trouble himself about the absence of a painter whom he had only known for two or three days. And if he had undertaken to find him, he would not have succeeded, nor Mériadec either, unless the idea struck them to bring the child to explore the Rue Marbeuf. But that was a very uncertain chance, and in the meanwhile Fabreguette had plenty of time to die of hunger, for one cannot live more than a week without food.

He felt already the cravings of his stomach, and he concluded from this fact that a considerable time must have elapsed since the abundant breakfast to which the doctor had treated him at the restaurant on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. How many hours? Impossible to make even an approximate guess. In the profound darkness in which he was, day and night are alike. Fabreguette had never possessed a watch, and he would not have been able to see its face even if he had had a fifty guinea chronometer in his pocket.

He tried to obtain by calculations the knowledge with which it would have furnished him.

He had arrived in the Rue Marbeuf during the afternoon. A man, however fatigued he may be, does not sleep more than twelve consecutive hours. It might be, then, a little after midnight. But, even admitting that he was right, Fabreguette was in no better position than before.

He stood up; he began again the voyage round his cell, sounding the walls with his hands, and he concluded the examination with as little success as the day before. The boards of the walls, varnished and polished like glass, presented a smooth surface. He might have broken his nails on them without even succeeding in making a scratch. He recollected then that he had a knife in his pocket, a wretched knife

won at the fair at Neuilly, a veritable "pig-sticker" which he generally used to scrape his palette with.

It was not much with which to make a hole in wood almost as hard as iron, but Fabreguette had read that Latude formerly pierced the walls of the Bastille with a nail, and he quickly dived into his pockets to find the weapon.

The artist of the red cap always wore loose trousers, *à la hussarde*, furnished with pockets as broad and deep as sacks; pockets which he utilised as receptacles where he kept all sorts of heterogeneous objects. How was it that he had not thought of making an inventory of all they contained the day before? He must have lost his head after the conversation with his jailer. And, in truth, there was good reason for it. He hastened to repair this omission, and the search gave unhopd-for results.

He drew out in succession a handkerchief with a square pattern, a half-filled tobacco-pouch, a short pipe, coloured to perfection, flint, steel, and tinder, the celebrated knife, and lastly—invaluable treasure—a box of matches, a box bought that morning, at the same time as the sou cigars, a box full of sulphur matches.

Thanks to this fortunate discovery, he was about to be delivered from a torture which the unfortunate wretches lost in the depths of a mine or in the subterranean galleries of the Catacombs alone know: the torture of darkness. Fabreguette, since he had awoken, had endured physical suffering from not being able to see. He felt shooting pains, as if his eyes were being pricked with the point of a needle, and his eyelids seemed to be of lead.

He possessed that now which would make this disagreeable sensation cease for a time, and yet this was not the first consolation which he sought.

He felt that which, for smokers, is a more pressing need than eating. He filled the pipe with the tobacco left in the pouch, struck a spark, lighted a piece of tinder, applied it to the "nose-warmer," and took two or three draws with as much pleasure as if he had swallowed a glass of cognac. The nicotine immediately excited his brain deadened by sleep; he felt a man again, and his thoughts regained their clearness.

Now or never was the moment to undertake—with a light, this time—a fresh inspection of his prison, and he had the box of matches in his hands, when he thought he heard a soft tread on the other side of the partition.

It was not probable that any one had come to his rescue, but it was not impossible that some one was coming to cut his throat, and Fabreguette's first thought was to put himself in a state of defence.

The sound became more distinct. The steps approached the partition. Fabreguette opened his knife, which was not a very dangerous weapon. There are cases when half a loaf is better than no bread. And Fabreguette had no other arms at his disposal.

For the rest, he did not remove from his mouth the pipe, which was smoking like a volcano. It was his last, perhaps, and he intended to enjoy it to the end.

Thus prepared for any emergency, he assumed an heroic attitude,

and waited—his arms folded, his head erect, and the knife concealed in his right hand.

Suddenly, dazzled by a ray of light, he started back, involuntarily shutting his eyes, and when he opened them again, he saw on the other side of the grating the odious face of his persecutor, lighted up by a double candlestick which the villain had placed on a bracket.

This light revived the prisoner's anger, and he proceeded to administer a verbal castigation to this rascally understrapper.

"What do you want here, villain?" he cried.

"I came to see whether we weren't dead," sneered the man in black.

"Not yet, dog!"

"It will come in good time, unless you decide to listen to reason."

"That is to say, to sell you the child, eh?"

"Oh, I don't care much about that, for I can do without you. I've hit upon a dodge to get rid of him without running too much risk. But I won't go back from my word. If you will write me a letter which I will dictate to you it will make my task easier, and I will pay you the price agreed upon—ten thousand francs."

"Go to the devil, ruffian!"

"To the devil? Fool! You will be there before I am, since you persist in refusing my offer. It's your look out, and you're quite at liberty to die. Only, remember, when you are at the point of death, remember that I offered to get you out of here. This thought will not soothe your last moments, and I believe men suffer fearful agony when they die of hunger. So much the worse for you, my lad; you will only have had yourself to thank for it. Every one to his taste, after all."

"I prefer that end to the one which awaits you on the Place de la Roquette."

"The abbey of Monte-à-Regret? You won't have the pleasure of sending me there. Sacha will be suppressed to-night, and to-morrow I and my master shall quit the inhospitable soil of your beautiful country."

"To-night!" murmured Fabreguette in consternation.

"Certainly. Our arrangements are taken to despatch the young cub this very day. Before night he will have joined his mother in a better world. And when we have once done away with him, we shall have no further need of you. For which reason, I shall come here no more."

"I sincerely hope not, for I should much prefer killing you to living, and I could never strangle you through this grating. You are too cowardly to come nearer."

"People don't go near a mad dog; I should be a fool not to keep at a safe distance. Now, I warn you that I shall never again set foot in this house in which I have trapped you. I am going directly to close all the doors and all the windows; I shall take away the keys, and as my master took the house for a twelvemonth, no one will enter it before next year. Until then no one will know what has become of you, and when the landlord takes possession of his property again, he will find nothing but your skeleton."

"Very well, the discovery will be announced in the papers. They

never spoke of my pictures whilst I was alive. They will talk of *me* after my death. It will be some sort of consolation."

"Swagger, my lad! Make the most of your time. We shall see whether you will brag when hunger gnaws your stomach. I should like to be here to enjoy the ugly mug you will pull, and to hear you cry for mercy. Unfortunately, I am going away, and——"

A fit of coughing interrupted the horrible speech. A puff of smoke, blown by Fabreguette, had got down the rascal's throat, and, half choked, he was trying to recover his breath.

"What! you are smoking!" he exclaimed with difficulty.

"Certainly. If I had known you objected to the smell of my pipe, I should have contented myself with a cigar."

"How did you get a light?" asked the major-domo eagerly.

"I alwavs carry a steel in my pocket."

"Only a steel?"

"I have sometinder and a flint as well."

"No matches?"

"No; they are too expensive, and they never light—the Government swindles the poor man. But what does it matter to you whether I have matches or not?"

"You might set the house on fire if you had any."

"Well, what then? I suppose it's insured."

"Oh, I don't care about the house. But all the inside is of pine wood. In case of fire, you would be burnt alive. You are in the centre of a building, all the chinks in which I am going to close up before I go. You would cry out in vain; no one would come to your rescue."

"Psha! roasted or starved to death, it's all one. I think even that I should prefer the roasting. But I am greatly affected to learn that you interest yourself in my fate," added Fabreguette ironically.

"I!" cried the man in black. "By no means. As you won't help us, you can die as you please. But I have said all that I had to say. There is nothing more for me to do here, and the marquis is waiting for me to carry out the Rue Cassette business. It will be mid-day soon, and I have no time to waste in useless chatter. Once—twice—will you write the letter? I have brought all the necessaries. Three times—no answer? Going, going, gone!" concluded the rascal, slamming the door.

Jean Fabreguette found himself in darkness once more, and, in justice to him, it must be admitted that he had felt no temptation to accept the offers of the villain who proposed to him to ransom his life by an infamous act of treason. Yet he knew that, this time, he was doomed without hope of respite, and that the miserable tool of the Countess Xenia's murderer would appear no more. His words had left no doubt as to his intentions. But one of his questions had given rise to an idea in Fabreguette's mind.

"Why," asked the artist of himself, "why did he talk of the danger of fire? Certainly not from anxiety about me; it was because he was afraid that I should employ this extreme measure to make my escape. When the cage is burnt, the bird takes flight—always sup-

posing that it is not roasted. It is just a chance, the only one that remains to me ; I have a good mind to try it."

This bold project was easier to conceive than to execute. A house does not take fire like a heap of faggots, especially when one has only a box of common matches to light it with ; and even if the attempt were successful, one would run a great risk of being burnt to death.

But the artist never doubted anything. He took the box from his pocket, and first of all set about getting a light.

Fabreguette's first care was to examine the interior of his prison. He had groped all over it, but this was a very imperfect method of exploration, for feeling cannot supply the place of seeing.

He was about to have it in his power to use his eyes to reconnoitre the apartment from which he had to make his escape, and he hoped to make some useful discoveries.

All his coolness had returned, and he reflected that the man was possibly on the watch behind the partition.

Accordingly he waited before getting to work, he waited and listened, and after a few minutes he had the satisfaction of hearing a faint and distant sound, which he concluded must be that of the door being vigorously closed by Paul Constantinowitch's hateful satellite.

With infinite precautions he took from the cardboard box a match, and gently passing his finger over the end which had been dipped in sulphur, he saw a bluish glow.

This was a good sign, for the last chance of safety depended on the state in which he found these splinters of pine wood.

"I hope to goodness they are not damp," he thought with anguish. "If they were, all I should have to do would be to scrape off the phosphorus and poison myself ; that would be better than dying of hunger, for it would be over quicker."

He felt the rough part of the box, and after having satisfied himself that it was dry, he made the decisive experiment. It succeeded ; the phosphorus took fire, the fire communicated itself to the wood, and finally the wood flamed,

But the light was but a speck in the darkness which filled his prison, and he could not perceive the far end of the hermetically-closed cell.

And when this match had ceased burning, he would have to light another, then another, until the box was empty, which would not be long, for he had only given one sou for it, and the State does not part with much sulphur for that sum.

His object was to find out whether the walls had not some weak point, and he used his first match to make a close examination of the woodwork over a space about two yards in length. It presented no solution to the difficulty ; it was as much as he could do to see where the movable shutter joined the planks of the wall. He noted, however, that these planks had been varnished recently, and that they would therefore burn easily.

But a match is not sufficient to set fire to a flat, smooth surface. It requires a supply of combustibles, and these the prisoner lacked.

However, he was not discouraged ; he continued his journey along the wall, and a second match served for an examination of two more yards, without any fresh discovery.

The question which Fabreguette put to himself was this: "How many more yards are there before I complete the examination of the room, and how many matches in the box?"

The further he went the more doubtful appeared to him his ultimate success; but he went through with it to the end, and his perseverance had its reward.

After having made the complete round he perceived, on the floor, at three paces from the wall, a heap of shavings which he must have passed close by in the darkness the night before, shavings of pine-wood which the carpenters had neglected to remove. There was enough to make a fine flame, but a flame would hardly have scorched the wood-work which it was necessary to pierce. The find, then, was not so valuable as it appeared.

Fabreguette removed these shavings with his foot, taking care not to set fire to them with the match which he held in his hand, and almost immediately gave vent to a cry of joy.

Under the shavings was a stove and a small heap of charcoal; the wherewithal to suffocate himself, like a work-girl deserted by her lover, and in case he was unsuccessful it would have been a last resource. But this providential charcoal might also serve to set fire to the wood-work. Who had left it there? Probably the workmen employed in the construction of this species of hut erected in the middle of the house by order of the tenant. They must have used it to dry the paint, and, the work done, they had forgotten it.

Misfortunes, they say, never arrive singly; no more do blessings. Fabreguette espied in a corner, close to the heap of shavings, a white object, a dirty, dead white. He picked it up and found that this object was a packet of candles, more precious to him at that moment than a nugget of gold.

"Saved!" he cried, clasping to his heart these sooty treasures; "Saved! I have all I want now to burn down this Tour de Nesle. What a pity that the villain who enticed me here is not in it. I should be delighted to bind him and let him roast."

And he set to work to perform a character-dance which would have had an enormous success at a dance at the Closerie de Lilas.

This fit of gaiety was soon over. Fabreguette possessed now all the needful materials, but it was necessary to begin to use them without a moment's delay, for the operation might be long, and he did not forget that the man in black had boasted of suppressing Sacha before the end of the day.

Now, according to this ruffian, it was near mid-day. The prisoner had therefore very few hours to finish a difficult task, for if he did not succeed in getting out before nightfall, it would be all over with the child, and with his friends in the Rue Cassette as well, perhaps. He lit a candle, after having taken it from the packet, which contained six, and armed with this bonâ-fide light he began minutely to examine the walls.

The movable shutter and the sliding panel appeared to him easier to attack by fire than the rest of the woodwork.

In these two places the planks, struck with the fist, gave back a dead sound. Fabreguette concluded from this that they must be less

thick ; and, well joined as they were, they presented interstices which could be enlarged by steel and fire. His knife was the steel, and he could easily procure fire in two forms : the fire of the charcoal, which eats, and the flame of the candle, which licks.

He began by filling the stove and lighting it with shavings placed under the charcoal which, in the absence of bellows, he fanned with his red cap.

It was the work of a minute, and he passed on at once to his next move.

After having sharpened his knife on the edge of the stove, and stood his candle on the floor in its own grease, he chose one of the joints of the woodwork and set to work to pare the edges—a tedious task, especially at first. The wood resisted the blade ; but he succeeded in making an opening, to which he immediately applied the flame of a second candle.

This flame soon charred the wood which he had been at work upon, and the hole became a little larger.

It was but a beginning, but the means was discovered. Fabreguette removed the charred wood with his knife, set to work to cut again, then applied the candle a second time, and so on, until the hole became large and deep enough to hold a piece of charcoal which he took from the stove.

The work progressed but slowly, and he took a whole hour to pierce the wall completely through.

The air from outside entered through the hole, and he could get his fingers through, but he saw no daylight.

The next room, the one in which he had stayed some time with the man in black, had a window, nevertheless ; but the shutters were closed.

Encouraged by this first result, he set to work again, taking care to make another hole underneath, following the example of burglars, who pierce several holes at certain distances in the metal of a strong box, so as to exercise afterwards with a special instrument enough leverage to burst the lock.

At the end of another hour the partition was riddled with holes. It only remained to make all these holes into a single one. But Fabreguette had no lever, not even a rod of iron which he could introduce into one of the holes to break the wood.

Upon this he resolved to resort to strong measures. He launched some hearty kicks against the wall, which shook without bursting it. Finally, he thrust the stove against the bottom of the pierced boards, heaped up the rest of the charcoal, covered the whole with shavings, which he lit, and awaited the result, which was not long in arriving. A thick cloud of smoke filled the room, the flames leaped up, and the wood-work took fire, almost as quickly as if it had been saturated with petroleum.

Fabreguette was beside himself with joy, but he soon began to draw a long face. The fire increased, and the more it increased the thicker became the smoke—an acrid smoke—which got down his throat and prevented him from breathing. A few moments longer, and he would die of suffocation. He had taken refuge at the far end of this issueless

prison, as far as possible from the fire, but he saw plainly that before long all four sides would be in flames, and already the position was no longer tenable.

The poor artist perceived a little too late that he had overshot the mark, and that the sinister prediction of the man in black was about to be accomplished.

In burning his prison, the prisoner was about to burn himself. But he was by no means resigned to this kind of end, and he took a manly resolution. The fire was besieging him; he rushed to it and attempted a sortie. He placed his arms over his face to protect it, shut his eyes, took a run, and hurled himself with all his force against the partition.

Fortunately it was ripe for the attempt; the fire had impaired its thickness. It gave way beneath the shock, and Fabreguette went rolling over on the other side, in the midst of burning fragments, and pursued by the flames which the fresh air revived. He had great difficulty in raising himself, and, when he did so, his clothes were beginning to burn. His only hope was to fly and escape from this house which would soon be nothing but an immense furnace. After having rushed through the rooms which communicated with one another, he bounded down the staircase, followed the corridor, and endeavoured to open the street door. On leaving, the man in black had locked it on the outside. On pain of death he must find another exit. Fabreguette had the courage to mount the stairs again and to enter the first room, which was already invaded by the smoke. The two others were blazing furiously, and the reflection of the flames served him for a light.

The window was shut, the shutters too, and fastened inside by a bolt which he broke off; but they did not yield at the first push, and Fabreguette perceived that they were nailed on the outside. It would have been all over with him this time, if he had not espied in a corner a pair of fire-dogs. He seized one, and used it as a hammer to burst the fastenings, which yielded beneath repeated blows.

This great lanky fellow, in spite of his thinness, possessed some muscle, and danger gave him the strength of three men.

At last he saw daylight, broad daylight, and he perceived with a sensible pleasure that the window was hardly three yards from the ground; a trifling drop for a lad of five feet seven inches.

He got on the window-sill, clung on to it with his hands, lowered himself, and fell into the arms of two workmen who by chance were passing.

Clouds of smoke issued from the window, and Fabreguette began to cry "Fire!"

The two men who had caught him began to ask for an explanation, but he took good care to give them none.

"I will go and fetch the engines," he said, thrusting them aside. And he took his course towards the bottom of the street, in order to avoid passing the coachbuilder's shop who knew him and might have stopped him as he passed. He was not at all anxious to tell him his adventure. His only thought was to arrive as quickly as possible at Mériadec's house, and he quite understood that if he remained in the

vicinity of the burning house people would accuse him of having set it on fire, and would take him to the police station.

That end of the Rue Marbeuf towards which he was going runs into the Avenue d'Alma, which he crossed at full speed.

He would have continued to proceed in this way till he had arrived at the Rue Cassette, so accustomed was he, from lack of money, to employ no other means of locomotion than his legs; but he remembered in the nick of time that that day he had in his pocket the change remaining from the five-franc piece so generously advanced by Daubrac to his guest at breakfast.

An omnibus passed by, going in his direction. He jumped on it, only too pleased to arrive quicker at the corner of the Rue Taranne, close to the end of the Rue de Rennes, where they have a halting-place.

His chief anxiety was to know what time it was, and he inquired of a neighbour who, instead of replying, pointed to a clock over a watchmaker's shop.

The hands pointed to six o'clock, Fabreguette had thus taken seven hours to escape from his prison, since he had set to work before twelve o'clock. In truth, it was none too long, but long enough for the man in black to have made away with Sacha, and the poor artist had emerged from his cell in a pitiable state. He had forgotten his red cap, torn his jacket and scorched his trousers. "I must look like a burglar," he thought.

And, in truth, the passengers looked askance at him; and the conductor closely examined the two-franc piece which Fabreguette had given him to pay his fare with. However, the journey came to an end without incident, and the honest fellow whom Daubrac jokingly called the third musketeer got down quickly when the omnibus stopped at the Rue Taranne, two hundred yards from Mériadec's house.

Fabreguette was nearing his destination. He decided that it was no longer necessary to run, especially as, in the state in which he was, he did not wish to attract the attention of the passers-by or police.

A man without a hat, running at the top of his speed, always looks like a man who has just committed some evil deed. So Fabreguette put on a staid air, although he was in a great hurry to finish his journey, and no one noticed him. In this neighbourhood, frequented by the colony of artists who have their studios in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, people are not particular about dress, and they took him for what he was: an artist and a Bohemian.

He soon left the broad pavement of the Rue de Rennes and slipped down the narrow Rue Cassette, where he was no longer likely to astonish people by his disordered apparel. He walked straight to Mériadec's house, and, on attempting to enter it, he was rather surprised to find the door locked which, as a rule, only needed a push. He knocked several times, but no one appeared.

Was this a good sign? yes, if Mériadec had gone out with Rose and Sacha. And yet, the housekeeper who waited on the baron should have been there.

Whilst he was wondering to what cause he should attribute this silence, a hoarse voice called out to him:

"The place is empty."

He turned round and saw a cobbler in a stall not much larger than a dog-kennel.

This man, who was occupied in soleing a shoe, looked at him in a sneering way as he plied his tools. He must have carried on his humble trade there for some time past, and Fabreguette was surprised that he had not noticed him before.

"The tall thin one has gone out with the pretty girl," continued the cobbler.

"How long ago?" asked Fabreguette, approaching the stall.

"An hour and a half."

"The child too, I suppose?"

"The kid in the fancy costume? No, I didn't see him."

"Are you certain?"

"Rot! I know him well enough, and I'm not near-sighted. I know them all, the folks that live in there, and the chaps that come there."

"Then you know me?"

"Rather, my lad. You haven't known the guv'nor long, but you come every morning, just when the grub is on. I was wondering how it was I hadn't seen you since the day before yesterday. He must be pretty comfortably off—four people to feed every day! It's true, it hasn't been like that long. He used to live alone with the servant. Since he has found a friend, he doesn't look at money twice. She's pretty, is the little one. But where did he lay hands on the brat in the velvet trousers, who wears boots like Bastien's? You might get me his custom."

Fabreguette, although he no longer felt light-hearted, could not help smiling at this disciple of St. Crispin's chatter, and the idea struck him that he might get some information out of him.

"The youngster is not what you think, my good man," said he. "But as you are always in your shop here from morning till night, you might be able to tell me whether any one has called on your neighbour to-day."

"His friend came to breakfast, the one that's a saw-bones at the hospital—a good lad—he operated on me for nothing once for a gathering on my thumb; he came to-day with the pretty fair girl, who went out early. If I was the tall thin one, I should be on my guard; the saw-bones went at two o'clock, and the fair girl twenty minutes after. Last of all, the baron went out too. Is it true he's a baron?"

"As true as true can be."

"Well, he doesn't look it. A baron ought to be fat."

"He went out without taking the child?"

"And without locking the door either, for a funny-looking man that I've never seen before walked in as he liked. The brat was alone in the house, and this gentleman only stopped with him a quarter of an hour, but the others have been going in and out all the afternoon. The fair girl came back first, and then the baron. He must have run, for he was out of breath. Perhaps you think that's all? Not a bit of it; the lean chap and the girl went out together. They looked as if they'd lost their heads. But this time the baron locked the door,"

"Strange," murmured Fabreguette, very little reassured by this account.

"I don't know what's being hatching there for the last four days, but I would bet a bottle of wine that the police have got an eye on the shop. Twice I've surprised detectives watching at the end of the street, near my stall. I believe they followed you the day before yesterday, when you went with the saw-bones."

On this, Fabreguette's suspicions were confirmed, and he was more uneasy than ever about Sacha's fate.

"There's the servant," said the cobbler suddenly. "She'll open the door for you!"

And, true enough, Mériadec's housekeeper who had come down the street without Fabreguette noticing her, was unlocking the door.

Fabreguette ran up to her, introduced himself, and entered without any objection on her part.

He had no sooner set foot in the court-yard, than he saw the rope ladder fastened to Sacha's window. To rush to it, climb up, burst open the two shutters with a blow of his fist was the work of an instant.

The astonished housekeeper, who was watching him from below, really thought that he had taken leave of his senses. She was so thunderstruck that she had forgotten to shut the door after her.

What must have been her feelings when Fabreguette re-appeared at the window and cried at the top of his voice :

"He is dead ! They have murdered him !"

And he began to descend by the same means which he had employed to get up, without perceiving that the woman had rushed into the street, crying :

"Police ! Murder !"

The cobbler made one bound out of his shop, but he could not accuse Fabreguette, who had only left him the moment before. It just chanced that two policemen arrived in front of the house at the moment when the servant called for help. They entered precipitately, saw a man on a rope ladder, rushed to him and seized him by the collar before he had time to put a foot to the ground. In vain he struggled, they did not loose their hold ; and when he tried to make an explanation, they would not listen to him.

"To the station !"

These words completed Fabreguette's exasperation, and he replied :

"By all means, take me, not to the station, but before the commissary. I've plenty to tell him about the crime in the Rue Cassette, and that of Notre-Dame." And he added mentally, "Mériadec can make the best of it. For my part, I've had enough of holding my tongue."

X.

AFTER the stormy interview with Jacques de Saint-Briac, Monsieur de Malverne had gone straight home, very anxious and troubled, but firmly convinced of his wife's innocence.

His friend's protestations would not, perhaps, have been sufficient to persuade him that he was mistaken ; but Rose Verdière's declaration had removed all his doubts, and he reproached himself bitterly for having believed the anonymous calumnies of a wretch who could be no other than the so-called Marquis de Pancorbo.

His wrath was turned on this man, and the husband, having regained his calm, became the magistrate again. It would have needed but little to send him back to the Palais to issue a warrant of arrest, and give his orders to the chief of police. But the late hour and, perhaps, too, a lingering suspicion had made him decide to continue his way to the Avenue Gabriel. He felt that he wanted to see Odette again, and assure himself with his own eyes that she was at home. He found her, as usual, having tea with a few frequenters of his house. She was in morning dress, and was entertaining with perfect unconcern her friends of both sexes. It was impossible to believe that she had just come home after passing through a terrible scene. Her face had not retained the slightest trace of emotion, and the cleverest man would have been taken in by it.

Women possess the gift of controlling the beating of their heart, and of being perfectly composed on occasions when their honour and life are at stake.

Madame de Malverne greeted her husband as cordially as usual, gently reproached him for being late, and offered him, with her own hands, a cup of tea.

Her hand trembled a little when she gave it him ; she controlled herself with astonishing firmness, but she was not quite mistress of her nerves.

Hugues did not notice it. He was all joy at finding her as he had left her, tranquil and smiling. If he had been alone with her he would have kissed her, like a husband who has been in the wrong and seeks forgiveness.

Odette read this thought in his eyes, and saw plainly that she had nothing to fear.

Jacques had doubtless got himself out of the scrape by some clever falsehoods, and the danger was postponed for a time. Free from all uneasiness, Malverne remained in the drawing-room and took part in the worldly conversation, which had no interest for him. They talked of fashions, theatres, races ; subjects upon which the magistrate could give his opinion, but into which he did not care to enter deeply. He left this to his wife, who was well up in such matters, and who acquitted herself to perfection.

When these subjects were exhausted, some one turned the conversation on the Notre-Dame affair. The papers had related it, with droll comments. Then, the following day the press had been silent as to this strange event, and the public did not know whether to look on it as a case of murder or suicide. The magistrate's name had been mentioned, but no one knew that Saint-Briac had for a moment figured in the inquiry.

Monsieur de Malverne forestalled all questions which might have embarrassed him. He stated very simply that without any doubt the woman exposed in the Morgue had been thrown from the south tower ;

that he thought he was on the murderer's track, and that the peculiarity of his position prevented him from saying more. Upon which the ladies who were present cried out against the discreetness of magistrates, and put their names down in advance for reserved seats at the assizes at which the murderer would take his trial. Malverne promised them, only too happy to escape so cheaply.

But one of the ladies in an evil moment took it into her head to ask why the captain was so little seen, and a gentleman replied that he was suspected of being engaged in a serious love affair.

Fate had that day decreed that everything should conspire to remind the husband and wife of that which they were most anxious to forget.

Another caller related that the evening before Saint-Briac had appeared at the club, and that his behaviour had seemed very strange; that he had lost a large sum of money, and that the general opinion was that he was only playing to distract his thoughts.

Then, enlarging on the topic, a third began to go over the list of society ladies whose houses Saint-Briac frequented, and to endeavour to ascertain the one who had accepted the brilliant captain's homage.

Monsieur de Malverne knew that the talkers were on the wrong scent, since he had just seen his friend's mistress, and knew that he had never met her in society. But this topic of conversation, which his wife did not seem to find particularly disagreeable, was infinitely so to him, and he sought some means of changing it.

He would doubtless have found this means if he had been in full possession of his faculties. Unfortunately, he had become susceptible to all kinds of impressions, and the smallest detail was enough to arouse his suspicions again. The scene in the Avenue d'Autin was constantly in his mind, and he thought to himself that Saint-Briac's pretty mistress had by no means the appearance of a fashionable lady, nor of a married woman.

From this, to believing that Saint-Briac had lied, was only a step; and the idea that his friend, with the object of deceiving him, had just played an infamous comedy, this fatal idea, which had only just been conceived, was not long in assuming a definite shape.

It soon took possession of him altogether, and it only needed a trifle to make him go and compel the captain to give him the name and address of the person whom he had seen at his house.

The difficulty of giving the tea-drinkers a reason for his abrupt departure held him back; but he did his best to get rid of them. There is a way of behaving to people which soon puts them to flight, always assuming that they have any tact. He put on a cutting, supercilious manner, hardly taking the trouble to answer questions, and affecting extreme *ennui*. One would have said that he had just assumed his magistrate's gown, and that he was speaking to prisoners.

Odette, alarmed at this sudden change, in vain redoubled her attentions and amiability; her husband's scowling face had cast a cloud over the party, and the conversation gradually ceased.

An unlooked-for incident suddenly put an end to a state of affairs which was embarrassing to every one.

A footman entered the room, went up to his master and whispered

a few words to him which had the immediate effect of making him rise from his seat.

"Business pursues me to my own house," he said in a cold voice. "Some witnesses, who did not find me at the Palais, have brought me some very important information. I cannot put off seeing them. Ladies, you will be good enough to excuse me, and you too, my dear."

No one raised any objection; Madame de Malverne still less than the others.

The magistrate left the room, preceded by the footman, who was astonished at his master's words and look.

When a servant has been a long time in a place, he guesses at once what is passing in the room. And this footman had seen perfectly plainly that a crisis was approaching.

This thought might have been seen on his face, and Monsieur de Malverne would gladly have questioned him.

But his double quality of magistrate and gentleman forbade him to descend to seek for information from the servants as to his wife's habits and movements. He would have considered that he had lost his dignity by asking this man whether Odette had been out that afternoon, and at what time she had come in.

"I am going to my room," said he. "Stay in the small drawing-room where the witnesses are. I will ring when I am ready for them. How many are there?"

"Three, sir."

"And one of them is named Mériadec?"

"The Baron de Mériadec. Yes, sir."

"Very well. Show him in alone, as soon as I ring."

Monsieur de Malverne intended to proceed in the same way as if he had been at the Palais.

His footman had come and told him that a gentleman who had been summoned as a witness asked pressingly to see him for the purpose of making a most important communication, and the magistrate had recollected the name of Mériadec. He did not believe much in the gravity of the said communication, but he always endeavoured to do his duty wherever he was, not being one of those men who, once having left their room, think no more of the case which has been handed over to them.

And besides, he had eagerly seized the opportunity to escape from the room where Madame de Malverne was entertaining her visitors.

To enter on the exercise of his functions is a healthy diversion for a man agitated by violent passions, and Odette's husband set about investigating again as he would have set about commanding if he had been a soldier.

For the matter of that, it was not the first time that he had examined witnesses or others at his own house, and his room was always prepared to receive them.

He took his seat in an easy chair, much more comfortable than the one which he occupied at the Palais, and prepared to listen to this Monsieur de Mériadec whom he had not yet examined, but whom he was to have examined the next day.

The police commissary had given him a very good account of this

individual, and it had since been confirmed by Saint-Briac, but he did not seem to have played a very important part in the affair, and for this reason Monsieur de Malverne had been in no hurry to examine him, nor, for that matter, the artist and the daughter of the keeper of the towers, who had not done much beyond putting the police off the scent by wrongfully accusing the captain.

But, since the day of the crime, these witnesses, who had been of little use at first, might have gathered some useful information, and they had doubtless brought it to the magistrate. It must be of a pressing nature too, since not having found him at the Palais they had set off after him to his own house. Monsieur de Malverne remembered, too, that the captain came to him two days before to ask for Mériadec's address, and he had a vague feeling that the baron would have some information to give him on one particular point. It was, indeed, for this reason that he preferred to hear him alone, knowing that he could summon the two others afterwards.

After having reflected for a few minutes on the new turn that affairs had taken, Monsieur de Malverne rang, and the well-trained footman opened the door for the worthy Mériadec, who hurried into the room.

The magistrate pointed to a chair facing himself, and was about to ask him what his business was, but the baron did not give him time to speak.

"Sir," he began, "I have not the honour of knowing you, but I swear to you, and it would be easy for me to prove, that my life has always been an irreproachable one."

"I know it, sir," said Monsieur de Malverne.

"Well, I have come to plead guilty to a grave fault, a fault which has had terrible consequences."

The magistrate was not expecting this, and he looked at the baron with more surprise than severity.

"I have hidden from justice a fact of which I ought to have informed it immediately, and this fact is as follows: After the arrest of Monsieur de Saint-Briac, who, in my opinion, was not guilty, I ascended the towers by myself; I thought that the real murderer had remained there."

"And you found him there?" asked Monsieur de Malverne eagerly.

"No, sir; he had had time to escape by the roof of the cathedral; but I found a child whom he had abandoned, after having killed its mother."

"What do you say?"

"The truth, sir; it was my duty to have brought this child to you—and I brought him, in fact, next day. But at the door of the Palais I met Monsieur de Saint-Briac whom you had just released, and there was no longer any need for me to prove that he was innocent. Upon this, I asked myself what the police would do with a little boy of nine who did not know his parents' name, and who had arrived that very morning from the depths of Russia, and I determined to take charge of him myself, and to undertake with two of my friends the task of finding his mother's murderer."

"A strange idea, sir. You took upon yourself a terribly heavy

responsibility. You should know that a private individual has no right to take upon himself the functions of the law. Your conduct was inexcusable."

"I yielded to my first impulse, and I have been fearfully punished for thus yielding."

"The only means of expiating your error is to hand the child over to the authorities, and I presume you have brought him here; if not——"

"He is dead; the villain who killed his mother has just murdered him in my house."

Monsieur de Malverne bounded in his chair and made a movement towards the bell, probably to despatch his footman for two constables. The man who said such things as these could only be mad, unless, indeed, he had committed the crime of which he had just given information. Mériadec saw this, and entreated the magistrate to hear him to the end. He related the whole story, from the time he had found Sacha on the stairs of the south tower; the visit to the Morgue, the meeting with the murderer, the unhappy child's past life, his arrival in Paris, and finally his death. He told him how he, Mériadec, had bound himself with Daubrac and Fabreguette to pursue the murderer; how Saint-Briac had come and told him that he suspected the Marquis de Pancorbo; how Fabreguette had disappeared all at once, and how the common enemy had gone about his work so as to get all Sacha's protectors out of the house. He ended by begging Monsieur de Malverne to examine Daubrac and Rose Verdrière, who were in the next room; also to examine the captain, who would testify to the correctness of this story, and he added that he was fully prepared to take the consequences of his conduct.

When the baron had concluded, the magistrate rose and said coldly:

"Sir, I do not doubt your good faith, and I do not suspect your intentions, for I know you are an honourable man; but you have acted with unpardonable, with criminal thoughtlessness, for if you had handed this child over to the proper authorities, he would not have been murdered. It will be my duty to make a representation of your conduct to the president and the attorney-general; and I do not conceal from you the fact that you will not get off with a reprimand only. In the meantime, I shall now visit with detectives the house where the crime was committed; you will accompany me thither, and I cannot engage to leave you at liberty after this visit. It will depend on the facts which our investigations bring to light. But, first of all, I desire to be clear on certain points in the story which you have told me. You said that a young girl was living in your house. How comes that to pass?"

"She has been living there a few days," replied Mériadec.

"She is your mistress, then?"

"No, sir. Rose Verdrière is no one's mistress. After the crime which was committed at Notre-Dame her father, who was keeper of the towers, lost his situation. The day after this happened he was struck with a paralytic fit, and he has just died in the Hospital. The daughter was left without a roof over her head, and with no other

resource than her work. I offered to give up to her a portion of my house, and she accepted. That is all."

"Rose Verdière! The name appears on the list of witnesses whom I have summoned for to-morrow."

"Yes, sir, and it is important that you should interrogate her to-day. She will tell you, better than I have told you, why she remained out of doors all the afternoon, and why I, too, went out shortly after her, leaving the unfortunate child in a bedroom, which I locked before I left. I received a letter signed with her name, Rose. She wrote and told me that she was waiting for me in the gardens of the Tuileries. I hurried thither, and did not find her. The letter was a forgery—it had been written by one of the villains who profited by my absence to strangle Sacha. Rose had gone to take some work to a shop, but that would have been a matter of an hour or two. Where did she go afterwards? She did not tell me, and I did not think of asking her. I was upset. I had just seen the poor little fellow's corpse."

"Certainly I will question this girl, and compel her to give me some account of the use she made of the time between her departure and her return. Did she return before you to the house where the crime was committed?"

"Yes, sir; I found her there when I arrived. But she had not discovered the child's body. It was I who opened the door of the room where he was killed."

"All these facts have to be verified," said the magistrate drily.

"Nothing is easier," replied Mériadec, surprised and shocked at the suspicious tone which Monsieur de Malverne had adopted in alluding to the Angel of the chimes.

"You say," continued the magistrate, "that this young girl's conduct is irreproachable. One can never be certain of such things. That she behaves correctly in your house I have no reason to doubt. But she is not there always, and you cannot answer for her past life. It does not speak well for her, in the first place, that she allowed the murderer to pass without noticing him, when he came to visit the towers with a woman—and a child, as it appears—a child of whom, till the present moment, no one has spoken."

"You forget, sir, that Rose was not there when they went up. It was her father alone who was guilty of negligence, and he has suffered severely for it."

"You take her part somewhat warmly."

"Naturally, sir. I know Mademoiselle Verdière. I respect her, I love her, and, if she would accept me, I would marry her."

"Your private feelings go for nothing, allow me to tell you. You say you know her. Since when?"

"A short time back, it is true. But I know her well enough to have formed an opinion."

"It is no less my right and my duty to inquire into her antecedents, as well as her present mode of life. She is very pretty, I have been told, and she goes out alone like the work-girls. It is almost impossible for her not to have a lover."

Mériadec protested by an energetic gesture against this supposition, which shocked him.

"It is possible," continued Monsieur de Malverne coldly, "that this lover has relations with the wretches who murdered the mother and the child—indirect relations, it may be. I admit, even, that if he played their game, it was without being aware of it. So much remains to be cleared up."

"Sir," cried Mériadec, trying to control his rising anger, "you will not be long in getting rid of these prejudices, which nothing justifies, and, since you force me to it, I tell you that Mademoiselle Verdère has indeed a lover, but not in the sense you mean. You may believe me, who love her and would willingly make myself acceptable to her. I have noticed that she is in love with my friend Albert Daubrac. He is young, he is!"

"Monsieur Daubrac is house-surgeon at the Hospital. He will soon take his degree. He belongs to a rich and respectable family. She cannot, then, hope that he will marry her. If he pays her attentions, it is certainly from no pure motive."

"He is too high-minded, and knows too well her value, to attempt to seduce her. If you doubt what I say, ask him. He is here."

"I shall examine him presently, but not in the presence of your protégée."

Mériadec, more and more offended, was silent. He could not understand the behaviour of this magistrate, who was spoken of as being one of the most eminent, and who, instead of taking indispensable measures, instead of hastening to verify Sacha's death and putting his men on the murderer's track, was losing his time by asking idle questions and unjustly suspecting the devoted friend of the poor child who had been strangled by a villain.

And, to tell the truth, if Hugues de Malverne had been himself he would have proceeded far otherwise. But at that moment it was no longer the magistrate who was speaking, but the husband. Since he had seen his wife, jealousy had turned his brain. A new scene had opened before him, and he was endeavouring to discover a connection between the latest incidents of this case which he had on hand and the events which had happened at the captain's house. He hoped that by putting some random questions to Mériadec he should obtain some item of information which would put him on the right track.

"Now," he continued, without appearing to heed the disdainful silence which the baron preserved, "tell me about this artist who also took a fancy to substitute himself for the law. He has disappeared, you say?"

"Yes, sir, two days ago."

"That means, no doubt, that he has ceased to visit you?"

"Not only that, but he has not been home. Daubrac ascertained the fact this morning."

"What do you conclude from this absence?"

"That he has been drawn into some trap, and is dead."

"A random conclusion, at best. This artist is a veritable Bohemian, who leads an irregular life. It must often happen to him to sleep out. The police report which I have received describes him as a sad dog."

"A sad dog, possibly. But he is honourable and good-hearted. We know from your friend the captain that the house where Sacha stayed,

on arriving in Paris, was probably in the Rue Marbeuf. The good fellow whose conduct you find fault with left Daubrac the day before yesterday for the purpose of going and finding this den. Most probably he found it, and he has not returned."

Monsieur de Malverne had trembled when Mériadec had spoken of the captain, and he asked suddenly:

"What part has Monsieur de Saint-Briac played in all this?"

This point-blank question appeared odd to Mériadec, who, however, did not see his way out of answering it.

"Monsieur de Saint-Briac," said he, "has only played an accessory part. I thought you knew it. You must have seen him more often than I since his Notre-Dame misadventure."

"I saw him when he came to ask me for your address," replied Monsieur de Malverne evasively. "I gave it to him, without knowing why he was anxious to speak to you."

"He arrived at my house when my friends were there—Daubrac, Fabreguette, Mademoiselle Verdière and the dead woman's child. He began by telling us that he had come to talk to us about the crime. We had thought so, and, in the name of all of us, I asked his pardon for having in error instigated his arrest. Then I spoke to him of the grand project we had formed. I told him that we had sworn to discover the real culprit. He appeared to approve our plan, and, in order to give him a clear idea of the position of affairs, I gave him a detailed account of everything that had happened whilst he was in prison; how I had found Sacha, what he had told me of his story, how he had recognised his mother's murderer at the Morgue. At this point, Monsieur de Saint-Briac interrupted me to ask for the villain's description."

"You gave it?"

"Fabreguette did better than that. He showed him a sketch, which he had done hurriedly, but which resembled him closely, and Monsieur de Saint-Briac exclaimed: 'It is he!' We asked him to explain himself more clearly. He raised some difficulties, but finally he told us that the portrait was that of a member of his club—a Spaniard, or supposed to be such——"

"The Marquis de Pancorbo?"

"That is the name that Monsieur de Saint-Briac mentioned, and he added that this foreigner was staying at the Hôtel Continental. We decided on the spot that Sacha, accompanied by Mademoiselle Verdière, should go and station himself in a cab, opposite the club, in order to make certain that Monsieur de Pancorbo and the man who in Russia was called Paul Constantinowitch were one and the same man. Mademoiselle went with the child, as agreed, but the false Spaniard did not appear."

"I know that; go on," said Odette's husband in a tone of impatience which puzzled Mériadec.

"After that Monsieur de Saint-Briac told us that he had had some dealings with the pretended marquis; that having, on leaving the club, followed him in a cab as far as the Rue Marbeuf, he had found on his arrival at home in the Avenue d'Antin an anonymous letter filled with threats. It enjoined him to interfere no more in

Monsieur de Pancorbo's affairs, and it was full of hints which left no doubt in our minds. This man murdered Countess Xenia."

"With what did he threaten Saint-Briac?"

"With betraying to her husband the woman who ascended Notre-Dame with him. It appears that this wretch had seen her from the top of the tower, and that he knows her. It was the opinion of us all that no importance was to be attached to this threatening letter, and that the rascal was boasting of knowing a woman whom he had never seen."

"What were his conditions for keeping silence?"

"I have just told you: he insisted that Monsieur de Saint-Briac should interfere no more with him. We refused to agree to this, be it understood; we had declared that we would pursue him to the death. Daubrac endeavoured to make your friend understand that he had nothing to fear for his mistress, and that if this man denounced her, the husband would not heed the insinuation."

"And Saint-Briac gave way?"

"Not at first. He would have preferred to leave things as they were, and it appeared to us that he was much less anxious about handing the murderer over to the law than about saving the reputation of the woman whom he loves. But finally he admitted that we had no alternative but to complete our task; that it would be cowardice to run away from the struggle, and that at the very moment when we had acquired the certainty of driving our hateful enemy into a corner. Monsieur de Saint-Briac felt that he had no right to dissuade us."

"And he proposed to act in concert with you against Monsieur de Pancorbo?"

"Not at all. He gave us *carte blanche*. He even promised to help us, but he expressly asked us to tell no one that he was one of us. He does not even wish it to be known that he came to my house. We had proposed to go to him, to tell him of the result of the experiment which we were to attempt that evening at the door of the club. He begged us to do nothing of the kind; and, to humour him, none of us went there. He says that Monsieur de Pancorbo dogs his steps, and that if he surprised us together he would write immediately to the lady's husband. Our interview with Monsieur de Saint-Briac ended there: he came no more, and none of us have seen him."

"And yet you knew his address?"

"Yes, sir. He gave it to us to enable us to write to him. He lives in the Avenue d'Antin—No. 9."

"You are certain that no one has been there? Neither Monsieur Daubrac, nor this artist who has disappeared, nor this young girl?"

"Perfectly certain. If one of us had gone there, he would have told me. Why should he conceal the fact? Might I venture to add, sir, that I do not see the object of your questions."

"You can be satisfied with answering them; and do not forget that you are here as a witness."

"I do not forget, at least, that the corpse of an unfortunate child is lying in my house, and that his murderers are not yet arrested. It is to be feared that they never will be, if you delay putting the detectives on their track."

"Are you teaching me my business?" asked Monsieur de Malverne, with a haughty air.

"No, sir," replied Mériadec coldly; "but if you have nothing further to ask me, I beg you to let me go. I must watch over Sacha's corpse, awaiting the time when I can avenge his death."

The magistrate felt that he had gone too far, and continued in a more moderate tone:

"It will be avenged, I can assure you, and, believe me, my questions have an object. For the rest, I have only a few more to put to you, and I expect you to answer them openly and clearly."

"Proceed, sir," said the baron.

"What did you yourself think, and what did your friends think of Monsieur de Saint-Briac's refusal to accept your pressing invitation to join you against this Pancorbo?"

"We thought that he feared to expose to her husband's vengeance a woman whom he adored, and that in his eyes this consideration outweighed all others."

"And you did not think of endeavouring to find out who this woman was whose reputation was so dear to him?"

"No, sir. None of us gave it a thought. It was a gallant man's secret, and did not concern us. If Monsieur de Saint-Briac had thought fit to confide it to any one, it would have assuredly been to you, who are his best friend, whilst we hardly know him. And I believe that if you asked him yourself he would tell you the truth. But—excuse me repeating it—it is less urgent to interrogate Monsieur de Saint-Briac than to arrest the villains who have already committed two crimes."

"I am aware of that, sir; but, if I have finished with you, I have not started with your friends. Monsieur Daubrac and the girl are here, you say. I must hear them, and hear them as I have heard you—alone. Be good enough, then, to return to the room where they are, and where you too will wait whilst I examine them. Send to me first the keeper of the towers' daughter."

This polite request was equivalent to an order, and Mériadec could not but obey in silence. But he had every right to be astonished at the magistrate's proceedings. Monsieur de Malverne appeared to him to be loosing his prey in order to catch the reflection, in only occupying himself with Monsieur de Saint-Briac's conduct instead of taking immediate steps against Sacha's murderers.

During the course of the examination which Mériadec had undergone, there had been no question but of the captain, and the baron began to believe that there was something beneath the surface which he had not suspected. He wondered whether Monsieur de Malverne was personally interested in the case, and whether the later incidents had not sown some seeds of discord between the magistrate and Saint-Briac, his intimate friend.

Magistrates are human, after all, and, like others, liable to go astray when the breath of violent passion thrusts them from the right way.

But the excellent baron did not yet know that Madame de Malverne was implicated, and without bestowing further thought on a riddle which interested him much less than Sacha's death, he passed into the

little room, where he found Daubrac and Rose Verdière engaged in animated conversation. He even overheard, as it left Daubrac's lips, the end of a sentence which seemed to be an impassioned avowal of his love.

The time and place were ill-fitted for love-making, but nothing stops a doctor when by chance his heart is deeply stirred, and Daubrac was the kind of man to face the prospect of marriage rather than give up Rose.

She did not seem to be encouraging his ardent language, for her brows were knit and her gentle face bore signs of unmistakable anger.

Mériadec, too, was anything but gay, and he was far from having cause to be so, for he saw plainly that the young girl loved Daubrac, and that he would have to give up all idea of the happiness of which he had silently dreamt.

"Well?" asked Rose, cutting short her lover's transports. "What is the magistrate waiting for, now that he knows the truth?"

"I do not know what to say," replied Mériadec with embarrassment. "I have just told him the whole story of Sacha and his mother, and he does not think he is sufficiently enlightened yet."

"What more, then, does he want?"

"He wants to examine all three of us, one after the other."

"To see whether we shall contradict one another!" cried Daubrac. "Does he think, then, that we are leagued with Paul Constantinowitch and his band? These magistrates are all alike! They see criminals always and everywhere. But do not let him take it into his head to ask me any offensive questions! I shall turn on him so that he won't care to try it again! I am not one of those men who have a dark blot on their lives. I have nothing to reproach myself with, and consequently I can laugh at magistrates and police commissaries."

"Calm yourself, in heaven's name, and don't shout like that. Monsieur de Malverne might hear you."

"Let him hear me! it's all one to me; and since he is anxious to examine me separately, I will go in and tell him my mind."

The doctor took a step towards the door, but Mériadec stopped him and said:

"No, not you; he wishes to see Mademoiselle Verdière first."

"Devil take him! we are not under his orders, and I'm going——"

"Please let me pass," interrupted Rose, looking fixedly at her lover.

"What, you are——"

"I am going to obey the orders of a magistrate who is about to pursue the murderers of the child whom we mourn. We came here to help him, and not to throw difficulties in his way. He is at liberty to proceed as seems good to him, and, as he asks for me, I am going."

"Take care what you say," cried Daubrac, "and if he tries to confuse you, do not answer."

Rose did not hear him. She entered the room and shut the door after her, leaving Daubrac and Mériadec alone together. Naturally she had not had time to change her dress; she wore the same one as when she had taken a cab to the captain's house. On leaving Mériadec's in order to call at the Hospital, she had lowered her veil, not to hide

her face this time, but to hide her tears. On seeing her, Monsieur de Malverne started with surprise. He was expecting to see a person dressed like a work-girl, and he found himself in the presence of one whose bearing and dress recalled some vague recollection to his mind. But *his* face was not concealed, and on seeing it Rose all but fainted. She staggered, and the magistrate was forced to support her to prevent her from falling.

In the movement she made to recover herself, she involuntarily lifted her veil, and Monsieur de Malverne in his turn started back with surprise.

Such a short time had passed since they had met, and met under such circumstances, that they could not but recognise one another, and if Mériadec and Daubrac had been present at this second interview, it would have been difficult for them to decide which of the two was most affected.

Rose understood at last that the guilty woman whom she had saved was Madame de Malverne.

And the unhappy husband knew that Rose and the captain had lied, in stating that a connection existed which did not and could not exist.

He had, nevertheless, the strength to control himself, and to question Rose in order to force her to confess.

"Is it you who are the daughter of the keeper of the towers?" he asked coldly.

"Yes, sir," stammered the girl.

"And you are also Monsieur de Saint-Briac's mistress?"

Rose, pale and trembling, cast down her eyes without replying.

"It was yourself who told me so, in his house, two hours ago. Have you already forgotten the scene?"

Rose shook her head.

"I, for my part, have not forgotten, and I can repeat to you all that you said, and all that that man said who was once my friend. Do you deny now that he is your lover?"

"No, I do not deny it," replied Rose, after having hesitated an instant.

"Very good. We shall see presently whether it is true or not. You know what it was of which I accused Monsieur de Saint-Briac?"

"I understood that you had allowed yourself to be deceived by an infamous charge. You must know now who is the wretch who calumniated Madame de Malverne, and you saw that she was not in the room in which, on the faith of an anonymous letter, you thought to find her."

"I saw that *you* were there, and I believed your word and that of your lover. At that time I did not know who you were, and I could understand that you had hidden yourself when I came in, for you told me you were married."

"What did it matter if I were not? was it not ruin for me to show myself? If I made up my mind to do so, it was because I could not let two friends kill one another on account of a misunderstanding."

"You were prompted by a very praiseworthy feeling, I do not doubt. You are Monsieur de Saint-Briac's mistress; I do not doubt that either, although it is far from coinciding with what Monsieur de

Mériadec has just told me about you. One question now: How long have you known Jacques?"

"Jacques?" repeated Rose.

She did not know who was meant. The magistrate had set a trap for her; she had fallen into it, and he continued in a biting tone:

"You do not know that Monsieur de Saint-Briac's name is Jacques? That is strange, you must confess. As far as I know, lovers are not in the habit of calling one another by their surnames—before witnesses, ycs—but when they are together, never. I return to the question which I put to you. When did you first see Monsieur de Saint-Briac?"

Confused, Rose cast down her eyes and was silent.

"You do not reply. Well, I will tell you what you will not confess. You saw him for the first time a few days ago, on the stairs of the tower which your father kept."

"I did see him on that day, but——"

"Spare yourself a fresh falsehood. Do not tell me that you were his mistress before he was arrested. If it were true, you would have stood up for him, you would have mentioned his name, and the detectives would have seen that they had made a mistake. You will not tell me either that it was you who went on to the gallery with him. All the witnesses swear that you had just returned home, and that you did not leave the room. But to proceed. You say he is your lover. Everything is possible. If you told me, for instance, that you had seen him since he came out of prison, that he accosted you in the street, that you liked him at first sight, that he proposed that you should accompany him home, as he might have proposed it to the first woman he met, that you hastened to follow him, and that you yielded to him at once; then, perhaps, I might believe you."

Rose burst into tears.

"You weep," continued the pitiless husband. "It is hard, indeed, for a young girl whom every one respects to admit that she yielded without resistance, and I should advise you not to confess this fault to your friend Monsieur de Mériadec, who believes that you are perfectly virtuous, still less to the young man who appears to entertain towards you a feeling more tender than that of friendship. It is true that these gentlemen will discover the truth sooner or later, and that now it might appear to them less painful; but at any rate this confession would not justify Monsieur de Saint-Briac. If he is your only lover, you are not his only mistress. And you were not the woman whom I saw enter his house."

"I swear it was I," cried Rose eagerly, who did not think she was telling a falsehood this time, for she was nearly certain that she had seen Monsieur de Malverne at the other end of the Avenue d'Antin when she arrived there from the quay.

"Be it so," replied the magistrate. "I may have been mistaken. The woman whom I sought is somewhat like you in figure, she dresses like you when she goes out, and I only saw her in the distance; but what does that prove? Doubtless she got there before you."

"If another woman had been with him, Monsieur de Saint-Briac would not have let me in," stammered Rose, resolved to defend the guilty woman to the last.

"Certainly not, if he were your lover ; but he is only your friend. And, listen ; shall I tell you why you went to his house ? To save his real mistress. You knew well that he had one."

"How could I know it ?"

"In the most natural way possible. Monsieur de Mériadec has just told me that Monsieur de Saint-Briac came to his house two days ago. You were there, and you heard Monsieur de Saint-Briac beg Monsieur de Mériadec and his friends not to take too energetic measures against the murderer, because this wretch had threatened to betray his relations with a married woman. Monsieur de Saint-Briac would not have said this in your presence if you had been his mistress."

Rose had not the strength to refute the arguments of this terrible logician. She could only hang her head in silence. Monsieur de Malverne continued :

"Thus, you were not unaware of the danger which he was running, and as his position could not but arouse your sympathy, you were, like the gentlemen, fully disposed to help him. An opportunity presented itself. A chance must have informed you that his enemy had betrayed him, and that he must infallibly be surprised by the husband this very day. You resolved to save him, and you hurried to his house. You arrived just in time. The woman was there ; but not I."

Dumbfounded by such astuteness, Rose became more and more confused, and Monsieur de Malverne, who plainly saw the fact, pressed her still further.

"You concealed yourself when I rang the bell ; you helped the woman to escape by the window, and you would have done the same, if you had not heard me threaten Monsieur de Saint-Briac. It was then that—moved by a generous impulse—you appeared ; this was not sufficient, you were heroic enough to accuse yourself, and this man accepted the sacrifice. You did not know who I was, and you found yourself face to face with me ; but he knew it, and he had not courage enough to contradict you and declare that you were innocent. The man is a coward."

The young girl trembled, but she was unable to protest against an epithet which her conscience told her was deserved.

"I do not blame you," continued Monsieur de Malverne ; "I can even find excuses for you. To sacrifice one's self to save the guilty is the act of a lofty soul ; but devotion has its limits, especially when it is ill-placed. Go no further, stop on the brink of the abyss, think of your reputation, your friends, and do not ruin yourself in trying to defend those whom the evidence condemns, and who will not escape punishment."

"You wish to kill them ; I to save them," cried Rose, without thinking that this heart's cry was almost equivalent to the confession of falsehood which the magistrate was trying to extort from her.

"And supposing I killed them !" said Monsieur de Malverne, carried away by passion ; "supposing I strangled this infamous creature who has disgraced my name ! Supposing I pierced with the point of my sword the breast of this false friend who has so basely deceived me ! Do you think I am the kind of man to be satisfied with a pitiful reparation, and with dragging these traitors before the courts to pro-

claim my misfortunes there? No. I have condemned them, and I shall have no mercy."

"They are innocent!" cried the terrified girl. "Monsieur de Saint-Briac had no other mistress than myself."

She had been on the point of confessing; the husband's terrible threats drove the avowal from her lips.

It was fated that she should sacrifice herself to the bitter end.

"Still obstinate!" cried the magistrate, irritated by this renewal of a resistance which he had thought to have overcome. "You persist in your untenable statements! You forget that it only rests with me to find those who will disprove them."

This time Rose grew pale. She had understood.

"Before coming to that, I am prepared to show to you, for the last time, that you are not and cannot be that man's mistress. In the first place, if you were, you would not live in Monsieur de Mériadec's house—and you must see that you are exhibiting in a very unfavourable light the honest man who gave you shelter. His roof serves you to conceal your chance amours; he lends it you to keep up appearances. Dare to say that! You are silent? I understand, and it only remains for me to deal justice to two wretches."

"Have mercy on them! they are not guilty!"

"Then, this man is your lover? We shall see whether you will repeat this statement before your friends."

And without waiting for Rose's reply, Hugues de Malverne abruptly opened the door of the room where Mériadec and Daubrac were waiting.

"Come in, gentlemen," cried he.

"By all means," growled Daubrac, who for the last quarter of an hour had been stamping with impatience.

"We are here," said Mériadec.

They entered, and were not a little surprised to see Rose Verdière cowering in an easy chair, trembling and half unconscious.

They were about to rush to her; but the magistrate stopped them with a gesture, and said in a firm voice:

"Listen to me first. You are a gallant man, Monsieur de Mériadec; you too, Monsieur Daubrac; I can speak to you of my position, for I am certain that you will keep my secret, at least until this affair has been settled.

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted the doctor, "we came here to inform the magistrate that a fresh crime——"

"I am no longer a magistrate," interrupted Malverne. "My resignation will be sent in to-night. I am merely a man who has been infamously outraged, and who is only anxious to have proof of this outrage. You can furnish me with this proof."

The two friends looked at one another. The same thought struck them both. They believed Monsieur de Malverne was going mad. But they could not understand Rose's attitude, who did not dare to raise her eyes to her friends.

"Listen to the facts," continued the husband. "To-day, in my room at the Palais, I received an anonymous letter."

"There has been a plague of them!" cried Daubrac. "The captain, too, received one two days ago."

"This letter informed me that Monsieur de Saint-Briac was my wife's lover."

What answer could they make to this? Mériadec and Daubrac, finding none, expressed by their gestures profound astonishment and polite incredulity.

"Monsieur de Saint-Briac, as you know, was arrested by mistake and imprisoned, because he refused to give the name of the lady who had ascended the towers of Notre-Dame with him. My unknown correspondent informed me that she was my wife."

"What an abominable calumny!" cried the virtuous Mériadec with the utmost good faith.

"He added that my wife had made an appointment with her lover, and that it only rested with me to surprise them at his house to-day, between three and four o'clock. I hastened there and found only Monsieur de Saint-Briac. But I had seen her from the distance entering the house. A violent quarrel arose between the man who was once my friend and myself, and—just as we were in the act of coming to blows—this young lady came out of the bedroom where she had concealed herself on hearing my ring at the door."

"You, Rose!" said Mériadec, addressing the young girl. "It is not possible."

"It is true," she replied, in a choking voice.

"I did not know her," continued Monsieur de Malverne, "and she did not know me. You are aware that I was to have examined her to-morrow for the first time in my room. It was not till just now that I knew who she was, and that she learnt that I was the magistrate commissioned to investigate the Notre-Dame crime. I tell you this, gentlemen, so that you may clearly understand what follows. She appeared, as I told you, and declared to me that I was mistaken, and that she was Monsieur de Saint-Briac's mistress."

"She said that!" cried Daubrac, clenching his fists.

"She said it, and she has just repeated it to me. I believed her at the Avenue d'Antin. I would not believe it just now, when I knew that she was the daughter of the keeper of the towers. I told her that her statement was incredible; I pressed her to confess that, out of pity for a woman with whom she sympathised, and for a man who had shown her some friendship, she was accusing herself of a fault which she had not committed. It was of no avail. She persisted in declaring herself guilty. It was then, gentlemen, that I determined to put her to a final test. I determined to see whether, in your presence, she would admit that her would-be confession was only a generous falsehood. I am most anxious that she should retract; but, whether she retracts or whether she persists in declaring that this man is her lover, my conviction is a settled one, and those who have deceived me shall pay dearly for their treason. I am waiting, gentlemen, for one of you to question this young person."

There was a moment's silence, terribly painful for all the actors in this scene.

Monsieur de Malverne, in spite of what he had said, was hoping against hope that his wife was innocent, and that Rose was about to furnish a proof of it.

Daubrac felt a storm gathering within him which was only too ready to burst forth ; he doubted her whom he loved.

Mériadec, dumbfounded, was asking himself anxiously whether he had not been deceived with regard to his protégée's virtue.

And poor Rose, having no choice between the scorn of the man whom she loved, and the death sentence of two culprits, looked suppliantly at her friends.

"You hesitate, gentlemen," continued the magistrate in a ringing voice. "You hesitate because it is repugnant to you to put this girl to a cruel test ; because you believe that she will still persist in her falsehood, and you wish to spare her the shame of saying before you, 'I am the mistress of a man whom I hardly know ; I have shamefully abused the hospitality which Monsieur de Mériadec has offered me ; I have deceived Monsieur Daubrac, and I am unworthy of him ?'"

"No, no ; it is not true !" cried Rose, vanquished.

Then, as if she regretted having yielded to this truthful impulse, she threw herself back and hid her face in her hands.

"At last !" said Monsieur de Malverne. "I knew that truth would out. It only remains for me to chastise the wretches, and I shall——"

He did not finish the sentence. A door opened, and Madame de Malverne appeared. She was pale as death, but it was not from fear, for her eyes sparkled, and she carried her head erect. The simple Mériadec imagined that she had come to throw herself at her husband's feet. She soon undeceived him.

"I have heard all," she said. "I am one of the wretches whom you are going to chastise. I am here. Why do you hesitate to kill me ?"

"Wretched woman !" cried the husband.

Mériadec threw himself between the two, whilst Rose got up hastily and clung to Daubrac, who did not repulse her. He had doubted her for an instant, and he was already reproaching himself.

"You confess ?" asked Monsieur de Malverne feverishly.

"Do you think, then, that I should allow this girl to sacrifice herself for my sake ? I thank her for compelling me to put an end to a state of things which is intolerable to me. I have loved you ; I hate you now. And if I abjure you before witnesses, it is because after this scene you will have no alternative but to fight my lover. If he dies, I shall die. One of us two must disappear. I hope it will be you."

After this violent commencement, the scene could not but end in a catastrophe. But God, who reserves for great criminals punishments in proportion to their crimes, God had ordered it otherwise.

The footman reappeared, and without seeming to perceive that a drama was being enacted in this room, announced respectfully to his master that the commissary of police for the Notre-Dame des Champs district asked to see him without delay.

This diversion happened most opportunely for everybody, even for Monsieur de Malverne, who had the presence of mind to reply :

"Very good. I will see him."

The officer of police was very much taken aback at being received by Monsieur de Malverne in the presence of such a numerous company.

Magistrates are not in the habit of discussing judicial business before strangers, and there were present two women and two men whom the commissary did not know.

"You can speak," said Monsieur de Malverne shortly. "What is it?"

"A crime has been committed which seems to have some connection with the Notre-Dame affair. I referred in the first place to my colleague in the Cité district, and he advised me to see you before sending the man who has been arrested to the Dépôt."

Odette cut short these explanations which had no interest for her. She had burnt her ships, and it mattered little to her whether her husband discovered the Russian countess's murderer or not. She had come to clear Rose Verdière, who was sacrificing herself for her, and not to hear a police officer's report. Monsieur de Malverne's behaviour had thrown a gloom over the drawing-room where he had left her, and her guests had departed one by one; they foresaw a domestic drama and felt that they were not wanted.

Odette foresaw it too, but she was not the woman to remain in a state of uncertainty. These people who had followed her husband home must have something important to say, and she determined to see them, even if she interrupted the audience by entering Hugues's room, a thing she rarely did. She had found a door half open, which the footman had carelessly omitted to shut, and, on listening intently, she fancied she heard the voice of the young girl whom she had seen at the captain's house an hour before. Upon this she had made up her mind to listen, and she had heard all.

It did not need this much to make her understand that she was lost: and her resolution was soon taken; save Rose, cast off her husband in the presence of witnesses—in order that the rupture should be final—hurry to her lover, and fly with him. Nothing else would satisfy her. She was mad.

And after the scene which had so shocked all who witnessed it, nothing remained for her but to disappear.

This she did, after having offered to Rose Verdière a hand which the poor child did not dare refuse to take.

Hugues let her depart. What could he have said in the presence of the commissary, who most fortunately had not been present during the scene? Rose and her two friends had been there, but Hugues had no longer anything to conceal from them, and he could count on their discretion, on their loyalty, on their sympathy.

He acted like a gallant officer who learns during a battle that his brother has been killed, and who, casting aside his grief, continues to lead his men against the foe.

He forgot momentarily the traitors whom he was longing to punish, and became a magistrate again.

"Tell me the facts," said he to the commissary, with a calmness which both Mériadec and Daubrac admired.

"This is what passed," replied the functionary. "Two policemen, on turning into the Rue Cassette, were summoned by an old woman's cries of murder. They entered the court-yard of a house from which she had come out; they saw a man descending from a window, by a

rope ladder; they arrested him and brought him before me. There this man told me his name was Jean Fabreguette."

"God be praised! he is not dead," said Mériadec in an undertone.

"He said he was the friend of the master of the house, and he declared that he had just found a child's dead body in the room which he had entered by the window. I thought at first that I had to deal with a lunatic, and I am not yet sure that he is not mad; he told me such an extraordinary story——"

"What have you done with him?" interrupted Monsieur de Malverne.

"As I had the honour to inform you, sir, I took him before my colleague of the Cité district, who questioned him, and who believes that the man is not telling lies. And for the matter of that, he does not look like having committed the Rue Cassette murder. For this reason I took upon myself to bring him here."

"Then, he is below?"

"Yes, sir, in a cab, guarded by two policemen."

"Good! Go and fetch him."

The commissary left the room, and Monsieur de Malverne, after having asked Rose and her friends to remain, said to them in an abrupt tone:

"I shall not send in my resignation to-day. I wish to finish with the murderers before I finish with the traitors. You will assist me, and will know how to keep silence."

No one breathed a word. Daubrac and Mériadec saw that it was not the time to speak. Rose, in a state of terror, was wondering what this dealer of justice would do with his wife. Fabreguette, conducted by the commissary, made a sensational appearance. He arrived bare-headed, his hair brushed the wrong way, his clothes creased, torn, burnt, and without greeting his friends. He was angry with them for having deserted him and allowing Sacha to be murdered. He began the account of his deplorable adventure, without omitting anything or disguising the truth. He did not even forget to tell the magistrate that the house in the Rue Marbeuf was burning at that moment, and that it was he who had set fire to it.

No one interrupted him, and when he had done:

"You are free, sir," said Monsieur de Malverne; "but I must ask you to accompany the commissary, who is going immediately to Monsieur de Mériadec's house. These gentlemen are going, as well as the young lady, and they will be good enough to wait for me there. I shall be there in half-an-hour's time."

They were forced to obey. The commissary could not take upon himself to demur to an order given by a magistrate, and the others thought that Monsieur de Malverne was anxious to have a private explanation with his wife.

"Have mercy on her!" murmured Rose Verdière as she passed. The magistrate remained cold as ice, and the young girl went, feeling certain that it was all over with the guilty woman.

She was not mistaken. Hugues de Malverne had condemned his wife and his friend. But he did not wish to execute them before having fulfilled his duties as a magistrate to the end. And besides, he

did not yet know what form his vengeance would take. Husbands, in such a case, have a choice of means. The wise ones are contented with driving forth the adulterous wife, and seeking satisfaction from her accomplice at the point of the sword. Others, still more philosophical, plead, and allow the judges to settle the punishment. They resign themselves to having the history of their conjugal misfortunes told in the ears of all the world. Monsieur de Malverne was determined to inflict a punishment proportionate to the crime, for this treason on the part of his best friend and of a woman whom he adored was indeed a crime. He asked himself whether, instead of risking his life in a duel, he would not do better to kill them both and blow his own brains out afterwards. The result of a duel is always uncertain; if he succumbed, his odious rival might marry Odette. It would have been folly to risk this, and yet the necessity of a meeting might be forced upon him, for the idea of murder was distasteful.

Hugues, before finally deciding, resolved to simply tell his wife to await his return and to drive to Mériadec's. In this way he would have a few hours for reflection of which he had great need in order to calm his mind, for he was so overwrought that his reasoning faculties had almost deserted him.

He rang for his footman, in order to announce his coming to Odette, and he was not a little surprised to learn that she had just left the house on foot, although the brougham was in readiness.

His first thought was that she had gone to her lover's, and the idea returned of killing them both. But revenge is a dish which must be eaten cold, said Cæsar Borgia, who was a connoisseur in such matters, and Monsieur de Malverne postponed his to the next day.

He was expected in the Rue Cassette; and thither he hurried.

XI.

AFTER the departure of his friend Hugues, the captain, crushed beneath the weight of his remorse, had passed an hour motionless, bowed down, turning over in his mind projects of suicide, and hardly daring to look in the face the terrible position into which a guilty love had thrown him.

This position afforded no prospect of escape. How should he get out of it? By killing himself, if he had only had himself to consider; but then what would become of his accomplice?

Rose Verdière had just saved her from immediate danger. But, afterwards, what would the unhappy Odette do? Try to deceive her husband again? Saint-Briac would not have lent himself to it. This life of perpetual treachery disgusted him now. And it did not appear that Madame de Malverne wished to continue it. Had she not declared that she was resolved to fly with her lover? And besides, this double existence which he had been leading for the past six months was henceforth impossible. Monsieur de Malverne might have believed on the first occasion that he had falsely accused his wife, but there certainly were doubts remaining in his mind, and for the future he would not fail to keep a watch on her. One day he would surprise the lovers, even if they contented themselves, as hitherto, with meeting out of doors.

On what footing would Saint-Briac live with this honest Hugues whom he had so infamously deceived? Would he even have the courage to see him again, to cross the threshold of that house into which he had brought dishonour, and to continue to play the comedy of friendship? No, a thousand times, no. And if he did not return there, after the reconciliation which had followed the scene in the Avenue d'Antin, it would have been equivalent to a declaration of his guilt.

Go with Odette, leave France for ever, go and hide his adulterous love in a foreign land? He, a brave officer, who had never recoiled from danger, nor from the accomplishment of his duty! It appeared to him like an act of cowardice.

Perhaps, too, without confessing it to himself, he had no longer the same feelings towards his mistress. The scales had fallen from his eyes. He saw her now such as she was, and he saw himself. They had both been so carried away by passion that they had forgotten that their fault was a crime. At the time of his arrest, reflection had shown Jacques the other face to his love, the treason in all its horror, and Odette in her true light.

Odette was far from feeling remorse; Odette had no pity for her unhappy husband; she loved him no longer; what more did she care for? Would she have pity on her lover when she had ceased to love him? Doubtless not. He would have sacrificed everything, and she would abandon him without hesitation, to throw herself into the arms of another. A frantic woman's heart dreads a void. Passion devours her, cries "On! On!" and she goes on until she rolls to the depths of the abyss, into which she drags the rash man who follows her on the fatal path.

This is the punishment, this is the vengeance of the honest man who has trusted in her, and whom she has driven to despair. These cruel truths came before Saint-Briac, and he saw no other possible issue than a definitive rupture. He would go away alone immediately, telling Hugues of his departure without informing him whither he was going. The pretext was already to hand. He could write and tell him that he was going out of the way in order to put an end to a false position, and to give him time to recognise that his suspicions were groundless. Hugues would surely not take his friend's resolution in bad part.

And Odette would understand that her lover wished to put an end to their intrigue. Six months of absence on his part would calm her, and she would not be able to commit the folly of coming after him, since she would not know where he was.

Where should he go? As far as possible. He thought first of Italy, but Italy is too near at hand. An idea struck him. Why not Russia? He would probably be able to gather information there about this false Muscovite who played the Spaniard in Paris, and who probably belonged to no country at all: a villain everywhere, a citizen nowhere. Mériadec had written, so he said, to the Governor of Tambow, but it seemed that Mériadec had had no answer to his letter. It would be a pious task to help justice to lay hands on a villain of the worst type, and the captain undoubtedly needed to atone for his faults by performing good actions.

He decided, then, to undertake the journey to Moscow, and resolved to start on the evening of the next day. It was none too soon to be out of the way of some fresh escapade on Odette's part, but he could hardly start sooner, for he had a few arrangements to make with his banker, and a passport was necessary to enable him to cross the Russian frontier.

Now, the day was too far advanced for him to busy himself over these indispensable preparations. He put off business till the morrow, and left the house which reminded him of recent and melancholy events.

He went out, after having told his valet, who had just come in, not to wait for him.

He little thought that at the very moment that he set foot in the Avenue d'Antin, Monsieur de Malverne was getting into his carriage to go and verify Sacha's death, and that Madame de Malverne had just left her husband's roof without hope of return.

She was hastening to her lover, and Saint-Briac would inevitably have met her if he had gone by way of the Champs-Élysées.

But Saint-Briac was anxious to be alone. He emerged upon the quays and walked straight on, following the Seine, without knowing whither this aimless course would lead him.

He had not quite given up the idea of committing suicide, and, in case he should decide to do so, he had provided himself with a loaded revolver.

Whatever happened, he only intended to return home for the purpose of packing his portmanteaus, after having settled his affairs and written a letter of adieu to Hugues de Malverne, which letter Hugues would, no doubt, show to his wife. By dint of walking along in the same direction, he arrived at the Pont de Bercy, and almost passed the Barrière. But night was coming on, and he did not care about spending it in the suburbs.

The club is the grand resource of those who, for some reason or other, do not wish to go home. One can be alone, or even sleep, there; and Saint-Briac was certain of not meeting the magistrate, who only came there very rarely, and who, on that particular day, would be less disposed than ever to put in an appearance.

The captain took a cab and arrived there just at dinner-time. He found a place at the large table, ate without once addressing his neighbours, and instead of taking coffee in the grand dining-room, as usual, he went to the reading-room and began to compose his letter to Malverne. This task was not a very easy one, and it took him some time. He had plenty to spare, since he did not know what to do until the morrow, and he was able to weigh at his leisure every word of this letter which was to decide the fate of his long friendship with Hugues. When he had finished it he placed it in his pocket-book, to remain there until the moment before he entered the Berlin express the next evening. He said to himself:

"I will post it at the station, and when Hugues receives it I shall have crossed the frontier."

Having finished, he went and stretched himself on a divan in the least frequented room of the club, and tried to sleep, after all the worry he had undergone, and his long walk. But sleep did not come

readily. However, he finally dozed off, and dreamt that Odette was clinging to his neck, to prevent him from going; that her husband appeared on the scene, and that he stabbed her in her lover's arms.

This nightmare gave place to others, all equally terrible, which would have tormented Saint-Briac till dawn, if an unfortunate gambler, on passing him, had not taken it into his head to wake him and say:

"What are you snoring here for, when there's such a magnificent game of baccarat going on in the green room? Monsieur de Pancorbo, who is holding the bank, is asking every one about you. He quite misses you."

"Pancorbo!" replied the captain, rising quickly. "What! he is here!"

"Certainly," replied the other coolly. "He is not often absent about this time."

"But it was said he had left Paris."

"It was a mistake. He certainly did not come here for two or three days, but reappeared this evening more brilliant and more lucky than ever. He turns up eight or nine every hand."

"And he asked after me?" said Saint-Briac, overcome with astonishment.

"He raised quite a hue and cry after you. He doubtless wants to profit by his run of luck to win a lot of money off you. He has pulled in enough already, and he is just now fleecing a pigeon who was elected last week—a Brazilian, who is rolling in gold. Don't play, unless you feel in the vein, but go and look, it's a curious sight."

The captain, only half awake, thought he was dreaming still. "What time is it?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Past three o'clock. Ah! you sleep well when you do start. You came and lay down here when you left the table, and if I had not shaken you, you would still have been in the land of dreams. Night is over for you now, and I don't suppose you want any more sleep, so it has just happened right. The game is not near finishing yet. It is different with me; I have just lost my last coin there, and I've had enough of it. Good night, captain, and good luck!"

Saint-Briac remained stupefied. How did this wretch, who was all but convicted of murder, dare to show his face at the club; and, above all, how did he dare to inquire after a man against whom, by means of one anonymous letter, he had declared war, and for whom, by means of a second, he had set a fearful trap? Whence came this impudence, and what fresh snare did this incredible audacity conceal?

On reflection, the captain saw that the so-called Spaniard was not risking much in coming to play one more game of the baccarat which paid him so well. It was in all probability his last, for there was nothing to prevent him from finally disappearing after the game was over.

And what could Saint-Briac do to him? What positive proof had he that he was the Notre-Dame murderer? None. Grave suspicions, indeed; but they go for nothing, when one has no power to have the man whom they affect arrested.

Monsieur de Malverne alone could have taken upon himself to commit him to prison, and Monsieur de Malverne was not present. Monsieur de Malverne must have at that moment other cares than that

of avenging the death of a Russian countess, and Saint-Briac was anxious not to see him again. He was thus reduced to take measures himself, if he wished to have his revenge on the cowardly rascal who had betrayed Odette to her husband.

"Be it so!" muttered he fiercely, "I have still a few hours to spare before leaving Paris. I will employ them in tracking this scoundrel. I have him now, and I will not lose him until I have handed him over to justice. As long as he plays, I will play, and when he leaves the club I will follow his steps. He will be forced to ask for an explanation, and then—we shall see, for if he provoked me I should have more pleasure in killing him than in delivering him up."

Having taken this resolution, a resolution more bold than prudent, he went to the green room, where he found Pancorbo seated between two players. He was no longer holding the bank; the Brazilian had taken it, but Pancorbo was plunging, and fortune did not seem to be smiling on him, for he had just lost a very heavy stake.

Saint-Briac went and placed himself opposite him, on the other side of the table, and remained standing, so as to be ready to leave the room as soon as the false Spaniard rose.

He did not seem to be thinking of it at present, for he had just placed a heap of counters and money on the table. But the attention which the game demanded did not prevent him from keeping his eyes about him. He saw the captain immediately, and had the impudence to give him a nod, which the latter did not return.

Saint-Briac would not exchange greetings with such a rogue, but he did not wish, on the other hand, to appear to have come into the room for the sole purpose of watching him. He took from his pocket-book a thousand-franc note, and placed it on the left side of the table.

He played to win, for he had only three thousand francs on him, and he intended, if he lost this first throw, to lower his stake, for he wanted to see the game out, and he did not care about borrowing from the cashier of the club a sum which he would have had to repay before leaving, that was to say, the next day.

He won, and Monsieur de Pancorbo, who was playing the contrary game to his, lost.

Only a trifle is necessary to make an impression on a man as nervous as Saint-Briac was at that moment, and he drew a favourable augury from this double turn of fortune.

The game continued with varying success; but luck remained faithful to him, whilst it seemed to turn its back on the pretended Castilian, who, to tell the truth, took this ill-fortune to which he was not accustomed very philosophically. After having exhausted his counters and the sum which each member has the right to borrow from the cashier, he began boldly to plunge with squares of cardboard which he adorned with his signature for the purpose of transforming them into thousand-franc notes.

Old stagers only accept these securities with their eyes open, and when they are certain of the solvency of the player who puts them into circulation; but that of Monsieur de Pancorbo had never been called in question, and no one refused them, not even those who doubted his honour.

He was believed to be too rich and too clever to leave unpaid these drafts which the signer must redeem within forty-eight hours, on penalty of seeing his name posted up in the club, and of being finally expelled.

Alone amongst all the players the captain knew that this arch-rogue cared little about contracting debts, for he had resolved to decamp the next day, and that for good. He was risking nothing by this last attempt, and he might win largely. Thus, he appeared quite disposed to play as long as the game should last; and nothing showed that it would end soon, for at six o'clock in the morning it raged more fiercely than ever.

Indeed, it was recruited at half-past six by four young and joyous clubmen who, after having sat at supper till dawn in the company of certain easy-going young ladies, had determined to proceed to the club, with the laudable intention of finishing off the losers.

They were out of their calculations, for they left upon the table the money which remained to them, and almost all this money found its way into Saint-Briac's pockets, who continued to play with unheard-of luck.

After his sad misadventure with Madame de Malverne, this was the least compensation that fortune could make him. Other punters had won in much more modest proportions, but Monsieur de Pancorbo had issued about fifty I O U's of one thousand francs, and the Brazilian was cleaned out. It was he who, about nine o'clock, sounded the retreat, after having counted his I O U's, and stated that he should redeem them the same day. The Spaniard decided too that he had had enough.

Saint-Briac, who did not lose sight of him, heard him call out to an unfortunate footman who was half asleep, and order some soup. Now was the moment to have a decisive explanation with his enemy. He immediately ordered a cup of chocolate and had it put on the table close to Monsieur de Pancorbo, who had just sat down and did not seem by any means to avoid the captain.

He was even the first to open the conversation.

"I have not been lucky to-night," said he, smiling, "but I am delighted that you have won. Would it be impertinent to ask how much?"

The question was an impudent one, and this familiar manner of renewing acquaintance with a declared enemy was the height of audacity.

But the moment had not come for Saint-Briac to execute his design. All the players had not gone. A few were grouped together in a corner of the room, talking of the incidents of the game, as one talks around the bivouac fire after a great battle.

"I would bet that you have won at least fifty thousand francs," continued Monsieur de Pancorbo coolly.

"Fifty-five thousand," replied the captain, without appearing astonished at this unexpected interrogation.

"A nice sum. And, in addition to that, you were lucky enough to receive ready money. That Brazilian pays in bank-notes, instead of in counters. It is a good system, and I shall make use of it in future. In

that way, one knows what he is about, and it is less confusing than I O U's. Talking about I O U's, you must have some of mine?"

"Not one."

"I am sorry. I should have liked to have you for a creditor."

"Why so, might I ask?"

"Because I should have come and redeemed them myself. And I should have made use of the opportunity to have an explanation with you."

"There is no need for you to come to my house for that."

"It would be difficult here. We are not alone."

"We shall be so in a moment. Look."

The group, in fact, was becoming smaller. The members were going one by one. There remained only two, who were discussing the grave question of "drawing at five," as they slowly walked towards the door.

During this time the footmen were opening the curtains, and the bright light of a beautiful spring morning flooded the green room.

"Open the windows as well," cried Monsieur de Pancorbo. "It's suffocating here, and it's time the air was changed."

This suited Saint-Briac, for they were breathing an atmosphere poisoned by the smoke of innumerable cigars which the players had smoked during the memorable game which had lasted ten hours.

"You can speak now," said the captain. "What have you to say to me?"

"I must ask you, first, whether I have to deal with a friend or an enemy."

"With an enemy; you know it well."

"I thought as much, but I wanted to have it from your own lips. Now I feel it easier to propose to you to put an end to a state of affairs which we both of us find unbearable."

"An end!" cried the captain, irritated at such impudence. "I am about to put an end to you."

"What do you mean by those words?" asked the false Spaniard coldly.

"You know well enough. I am going to suppress you."

"And how, if you please?"

"By handing you over to justice, who will demand an account of all your crimes."

"You mean to say of the death of that woman who was thrown from the top of one of the towers of Notre-Dame! You still think, then, that it was I who did it?"

"I can prove it."

"You surprise me. But I can guess how the mistake has arisen. You received from me a letter which you must have looked upon as a proof. In that letter I threatened to betray to Monsieur de Malverne your relations with his wife, if you continued to dog me. You concluded from that that I was the man whom you sought. Allow me to tell you that that is a hasty conclusion. I keep my existence a secret, and I will not allow any one to follow me; that is no reason why I should be a murderer."

"What are you, then?"

"A conspirator, purely and simply. I left Spain after the late political events, and I am anxious to return to my country. I am trying to overthrow the Government which proscribed me, and I am on the point of succeeding. All is ready for a revolution which I have prepared in Paris, and which will shortly burst out in Madrid; so shortly that I leave this evening; and I shall cross the Pyrenees to-morrow, to place myself at the head of the movement. If you denounced me, I should perhaps be arrested by the French police, and my plans would miscarry; but I should have no trouble in proving that I had no hand in the Notre-Dame crime, for, having no further need of secrecy, I should cast aside the mystery which has surrounded my life in Paris. I should make known my real name, and I should produce twenty witnesses to bear testimony to the truth of my statements. So I should advise you not to attempt it. You would only succeed in creating a scandal which you have every interest in hushing up."

"Not now: you wrote and told Monsieur de Malverne that I was his wife's lover; and I have no longer anything to lose."

"I did write, I admit, and I regret having been forced to that extremity. It was your doing. I had you watched; I learnt that, in order to dog me, you had come to an understanding with I don't know what knaves, of whom the chief is a kind of Don Quixote, a lunatic. I could not tolerate their goings-on, and I held you to account for them. You paid for them; I am sorry, but I wanted to sicken you of making war on me. The safety of my country was involved, and the lives of many brave men, my political friends, who are compromised in Spain, and who would have suffered the same fate as I, if I had been arrested in France."

"Then, you admit that it was you who wrote an anonymous letter to Monsieur de Malverne yesterday to inform him that Madame de Malverne was at my house?"

"Certainly. I know that he went there, but am ignorant as to what passed between you. It seems to me that it was nothing very serious, as you have just passed the night playing cards, and I might be satisfied with this first warning which I have given you. But you will never forgive me for what I have done; for my part, I can no longer trust you. Therefore, one of us must disappear."

"Are you proposing a duel?"

"Yes, for want of some better means. It is the only practical solution of the difficulty in which we are placed; and yet it is not very convenient in conclude it in this way. In the first place, I start to-night."

"And I too."

"We might agree to meet abroad, but that would be useless, for, once out of France, we should have nothing more to fear from one another. And besides, I don't suppose we are both going to the same country."

"I am going to Russia."

"To seek the Notre-Dame murderer?" sneered Monsieur de Pan-corbo. "I hope you will find him there. But, as I am not obliged to believe your word, I should prefer to settle our accounts on the spot."

"And I too!" cried the captain.

"That is precisely the difficulty. Witnesses are necessary for a duel, and, under the circumstances, we should have some trouble in finding any."

"We can do without them."

"If that is your opinion, there is no reason why we should not conclude the business this morning. I will go so far as to say that it would be better that we should not part before having done so. You mistrust me; I mistrust you. By keeping together we shall both of us be sure that the other is not meditating any treason. There remains the question of weapons. We will go together and buy them. I certainly have a revolver on me——"

"I have one too."

"Very well; but is it the same bore as mine?"

"Exactly," said Pancorbo, after having compared the two weapons, which by a simultaneous movement the two adversaries had taken from their pockets. "Six bullets for each of us; six bullets of the same weight. All the revolvers sold by Parisian gunmakers are of the same pattern. Now, where shall we fight?"

"It matters little to me, so long as it is to the death," said Saint-Briac, seized with rage, and resolved to go through with it at any price.

"That is understood," replied Pancorbo. "One of us must remain on the field. Without that, it would not be worth the trouble. To return to my question: Where shall we fight? The suburbs of Paris are so frequented, especially at this time of year, that we might walk for hours together without finding a suitable place. And neither of us has any time to waste. We should have to go further out."

"Or nearer. In a house. At my house, for instance."

"Point blank, then, for I don't suppose you have a room twenty yards long, or even ten. On the other hand, you have servants, and at the first shot they would go and fetch the police. What I should like would be some place where we should be absolutely alone, and where the one who survives will have no reason to dread being arrested by too zealous servants."

"I know no better place than a field, out in the country, like one secs in the plain of Saint-Denis or the plain of Vanves."

"That is too far; an idea strikes me, suggested by the crime of which you so unjustly accuse me."

"I do not understand."

"The woman whom you wish to avenge was thrown, you say, from the top of one of the towers of Notre-Dame. And no one disturbed the murderer, since he was able to escape without being arrested. What do you think of a duel at the same spot?"

"I think it is impossible. You would not find there what we seek. In the first place, the towers are open to the public. A few sous only are necessary to ascend them. We should be preceded or followed by visitors. And further, the platform which crowns the summit of the tower is not much larger than a room."

"We should not need to climb up there. What I propose to you is a duel in the American fashion, and the galleries which surround the base of the towers would suit admirably. There are turns and corners admirably suited for an ambushade. Each one of us would take up his

position at either end of the gallery which runs above the rose-window over the porch, and would start in pursuit of his adversary. At that height the sound of a shot is lost in space, and the passers-by in the precincts would hear nothing. As for visitors, who could disturb us? We should choose our time. We should wait till those who had arrived before us had gone, and we should have ample time to finish before others approached. Strangers rarely go up except during the afternoon. In the morning no one is there. In any case, it is worth trying, as the survivor can immediately make his escape from Paris; and I can tell you why I should prefer to fight up there. You have accused me, and you accuse me still, of having committed an atrocious crime in that very spot. I want to prove to you that I am not afraid of encountering the ghost of my supposed victim. And yet, I swear to you that, like all my countrymen, I am superstitious; were I guilty, my hand would tremble on this gallery to which I propose to ascend with you."

Saint-Briac was impulsive, and accessible to any sudden impression, and this strange argument struck him with much greater force than all the other reasons put forward by the inexplicable individual with whom he had to deal.

In a few moments he began to doubt the evidence, and to wonder whether this man was not really a Spaniard and a conspirator, whom Mériadec and his friends had mistaken for the countess's murderer. He was not aware of the latest crimes of him whom they accused; he was ignorant of Sacha's murder and Fabreguette's imprisonment. The anonymous letter to Monsieur de Malverne might have been written by Pancorbo to rid himself of a man who, by dogging his steps, was ruining his political plans.

Saint-Briac's imagination played him the fatal trick of leading him to forget the facts which went to condemn this wretch, and, to complete his misfortune, the extravagant conditions of this duel had a strange attraction for him.

The meeting was inevitable, since Pancorbo confessed his treachery, and the captain preferred that the quarrel should not be settled in humdrum style, as if it had been a case of adjusting an ordinary dispute or avenging some trifling insult.

What he wished was to kill his enemy or to be himself killed, and to get it over as soon as possible.

"Agreed!" said he, "let us try it. If we find the place occupied, we will go and fight in a quarry. I know of one at Montrouge which seems to have been made for the express purpose."

"Then, come along, sir," replied Monsieur de Pancorbo, rising. "Since it is decided that we shall go together, we will take a cab in order to arrive there more quickly."

This arrangement suited Saint-Briac. He had not quite got rid of his mistrust, and he wished to prevent his adversary from communicating with some accomplice, like the one who had waited one evening for him at the door of the club, after having accosted him in the Champs-Élysées.

The captain watched his foe as they descended the front steps. He did not notice any sign addressed to the footmen who were yawning in the entrance, and he did not see any suspicious face in the street.

There was no lack of cabs at the door. They took one, and Monsieur de Pancorbo told the driver to set them down at the corner of the precincts and the Rue d'Arcole.

It was exactly the spot where, on the day of the crime, Sacha had got out of the cab with his mother ; but the captain, who was ignorant of this detail, was not in a position to notice the coincidence.

They arrived there quickly, and directly their feet touched the ground Monsieur de Pancorbo hastened to dismiss the cab, after having paid the fare.

"It is contrary to custom," he said, laughing. "It is usual to retain a conveyance to take away the wounded, but that will not be the case with us. There will be but one corpse."

"Or two," added the captain, looking fixedly at his adversary.

"Let us hope that one of us will survive. But, whatever happens, we have no time to lose. I see no one on the gallery, nor on the tower. Let us seize the favourable moment.

They walked straight to the entrance, ascended the spiral staircase, and soon arrived at the gate, which was shut.

The new keeper answered their ring, and received them more politely than the late Verdière would have done.

"You have opened the ball, gentlemen," said he, after having pocketed the usual fee. "This is the third day I have been here, and the first on which the authorities have given orders to allow any one to go up. It was forbidden on account of that unfortunate affair, and I have been informed that the magistrate would come to-day to inspect the south tower. I have orders to keep the gate shut to every one, after eleven o'clock, but it is only ten now. You did well to come early, gentlemen, the air is clear, and you will be the only ones to admire the beautiful view."

Monsieur de Pancorbo rewarded this information with a coin ; it appeared to be very gratifying to him ; but was much less so to Saint-Briac.

He was even very nearly determined to turn back rather than find himself face to face with Monsieur de Malverne. But the die was cast. And besides, the fight with revolvers could not continue long without the death of one of the combatants putting an end to it ; and Hugues never went to the Palais till after breakfast.

"When he arrives," said the captain to himself, "he will only find the corpse of Odette's betrayer—or mine. If I am killed, he will, perhaps, forgive her who survives, and if I kill this man, he will never hear of me again—nor she either."

"After you, sir," said Saint-Briac.

"You wish to give precedence to me ?" asked the so-called Marquis de Pancorbo, sneering.

"Most undoubtedly."

"As you will. I am not mistrustful."

The false Spaniard had perfectly understood that the captain feared to be killed from behind in ascending the stairs, and he knew well that the captain would not act thus treacherously. So he made no difficulty about going first.

The keeper had re-entered his room and took no further notice of

them. Thus they had a clear field, and when they emerged upon the gallery, they had nothing further to do than to settle the conditions of the combat.

It did not take long to do this.

"It is agreed," said Pancorbo, "that each of us has the right to fire until his revolver is empty, that is to say, six shots. To shoot as we can; all artifices are allowed. As for choice of places, chance shall decide that, if you like."

"I give you your choice," said the captain.

"Then, I choose the south tower—the tower of the crime, if I am not mistaken. You will remain here whilst I traverse the gallery. When I have arrived at the other end, you will give me the signal by raising your revolver in the air, the barrel pointing towards the sky. I will do the same, and from that moment we shall be at liberty to fire at will. Is it agreed?"

"It is agreed. Go, sir."

The pretended conspirator proceeded along the gallery, but he took good care to walk backwards, in order not to lose sight of his adversary, who, however, did not dream of taking any advantage.

Saint-Briac could not look without deep emotion at this gallery where he had ascended with Madame de Malverne; and his eyes sought the place where she had leaned over at the moment when the wind carried away her veil.

Their misfortunes had begun there. A strange fatality had led him back to the spot. He cared little whether he died there now, provided that, before falling, he killed the villain who had ruined them. The captain, dismissing the sad recollections of the past, replied to the signal, and thought no more but of fighting.

He had already lost sight of his adversary, who had at once hidden himself behind a projecting angle. Saint-Briac imitated this manœuvre, and wondered how he should go to work to attack without exposing himself.

The confined ground where the affair was about to be decided was familiar to him from his disastrous walk with Odette. He knew that the two towers are encircled at their base by a gallery, and that this circular gallery is only the continuation of the one which is situated above the central rose-window; he knew that this narrow path forms a recess on each of the four faces of each tower, and that it joins the front and rear. At the front, one hundred feet beneath this kind of suspended bridge, is the pavement of the precincts.

At the back is a void space, below which commence the roofs of the nave, surrounded in their turn by balustrated galleries.

Between them lies a square area covered with lead, containing two enormous zinc reservoirs full of rain water, to be used in case of fire.

The safest plan was evidently to remain in hiding, and wait until his adversary showed himself. But if the captain and the Spaniard both made the same calculation they were destined never to meet, and neither of them had come there to perform a kind of armed promenade.

And besides, Saint-Briac's character was ill-adapted to a system of temporising which would have exposed him to be surprised by Monsieur

de Malverne, whom the keeper was expecting, and who would not fail to appear shortly with all the pomp and appurtenances of a judicial visit. Monsieur de Pancorbo must have still more reason to fear the arrival of the magistrate and his officers.

"We should have done better to have simply placed ourselves at fifteen paces, and to have fired till one of us was killed," thought the captain. "I want to put an end to it, and I shall advance. In order to fire on me he must of necessity show himself, and then the best man wins.

Before starting he made certain that the six cartridges were in their metal chambers, that the mechanism which brings them one after the other to the mouth of the barrel acted easily, and that the pull was not too hard.

Having taken these precautions, he began to skirt the massive base of the north tower. His plan was to reach that side which commanded the nave, to traverse the gallery at full speed, and to attack Pancorbo in the stone recess where he had seen him conceal himself.

He advanced, then, stealthily, and unfortunately never thought of looking back.

Now, the Spaniard had had exactly the same idea. He had issued from his hiding-place, and leaving the protecting shelter of the outer tower had made his way along the gallery which runs above the rose-window, and arrived, revolver in hand, at the place which the captain had just left. Not finding him there, he understood and followed. Saint-Briac, before starting, halted a few seconds in order to make sure that his enemy was not watching him from behind a projecting angle. It was sufficient to be the undoing of him.

The odious Pancorbo fired point-blank at him from behind, and killed him on the spot with a bullet which shattered the vertebral column.

Odette de Malverne's guilty lover fell with his face to the ground, and his murderer lost no time in despoiling him of the sum which he had won at play during the previous night. It was solely to rob him of this that he had proposed this mad duel. He thought that fifty-five thousand francs would be useful for him to take possession of and carry away with him on leaving France without any idea of return. He had no further business there. All his abominable plans had been carried out. His vile accomplice had already crossed the frontier. There was nothing to prevent him from doing the same that very evening.

He searched the body, took the bank-notes which were in the pocket-book, stuffed them into his pockets and hastened to descend the stairs. He, too, knew that justice was coming, and he did not wish to be caught red-handed.

The American duel had not lasted ten minutes. The survivor had therefore reason to hope that he would be able to leave unquestioned; and, once in the street, he would have nothing more to fear, for everything was prepared for his departure. So he glided into the narrow staircase, but he had not descended three stairs when he fancied he heard the sound of voices and steps beneath him.

He stopped to listen, and soon acquired the certainty that several

persons were ascending. To go further was out of the question for him. These people, whoever they were, even if they did not stop him on the way, would find the captain's body on the gallery; they would easily guess that the man whom they had just passed on the stairs was the murderer, and would start in pursuit of him. It would be better to mount again and make an attempt to escape in some other way.

He knew one which he had already made use of in his flight after having thrown the countess from the tower; a perilous road under any circumstances, but which emerged into a staircase in the wall which supported the roof of the nave.

He had no choice, and he rushed to the spot where, by climbing over the balustrade, he could drop on to a sloping ledge which projected from the wall.

It was by bestriding this ledge and sliding down it that, on the day of his first crime, he had been able to reach the bottom of the kind of valley which separates the nave from the two towers, and to find there the starting-point of a stone staircase suspended in the air.

This staircase had led him to the gallery which encircles the body of the cathedral, including the choir. It was quite practicable, and the rest of the journey presented no difficulty.

The walk along the roof had the inconvenience of not being able to be effected without exposure, but the danger only existed at the beginning of it, that is to say, from the moment of the leap from the gallery. If he missed this perilous leap, if instead of falling astride of the ledge he swerved in the least degree, or, if once astride, he lost his balance, then would of necessity commence a series of falls which must end on the pavement.

But this enigmatical man, this cosmopolitan villain who only seemed to change his name and nationality in order more easily to commit every kind of crime, was strong and adroit.

And at this moment he was playing his last card. Everything had hitherto succeeded. By dint of audacity and odious manoeuvres he had been successful in ridding himself of all those who had declared war on him. He had just treacherously killed his most dangerous enemy, and he was about to quit France, laden with the spoil of his victims. It was only necessary to leap well, and also to leap quickly, for if he let himself be seen by the persons whom he had just heard ascending the stairs, it was all over with him, at the very moment when he had got over the most dangerous part of his task. The captain's body was lying there. The fresh arrivals, if they saw a man rushing along the roofs of the nave, would not fail to cry "Murder!"

And if they did not risk giving him chase, they would certainly hurry down, give the keeper warning, and, once below, call policemen and even passers-by to join in cutting off the fugitive's retreat by guarding all the outlets of the cathedral. The wretch made all these calculations in much less time than they take to write, rushed to the spot where his flight was to begin, and leaned over the balustrade to measure the distance with his eye, and calculate his spring.

He was still in this position when Mériadec, Daubrac, and Fabreguette emerged on the opposite side, that is to say, on the front gallery.

How had they got there? Pancorbo, who could not yet see them, would not have believed his eyes had he done so; but he would not have failed to attack them, for the only means of escape which remained was to kill them as he had just killed Monsieur de Saint-Briac.

A providential chance had brought them there sooner than they were to have come, and too late, unfortunately, to save the captain.

The day before, after their collective visit to Monsieur de Malverne, they had passed the whole evening in answering the magistrate's questions, who had immediately gone to the Rue Cassette. The scene of Sacha's murder had to be gone over, and the facts which had preceded it explained.

Rose Verdière had had to relate all that she had done, and this time she had to resign herself to tell the whole truth. Monsieur de Malverne had known it since the defiance which his wife had hurled in his face, in the presence of the two friends and of the Angel of the chimes.

Monsieur de Malverne had listened to Rose's confessions without for one moment losing that feigned tranquillity, a tranquillity more terrible than anger.

The sitting had been prolonged far into the night, and was not concluded until after the removal of Sacha's body, which had to undergo a *post mortem* examination, as had that of his unfortunate mother.

Before leaving, Monsieur de Malverne had told Rose Verdière that she would be exempt from any further examination. He had gone so far as to loudly express his good opinion of her; the magistrate excused her for having lied to save a woman, and the husband bore her no ill-will.

He had announced at the same time to the gentlemen that he should henceforward conduct the case on a fresh basis, and that his measures were already taken so that the countess's murderer and his accomplice should not this time escape a better organised pursuit.

The police were on the alert; the house in the Rue Marbeuf surrounded, although, after the fire which Fabreguette had kindled, only the ruins were left; the so-called Pancorbo's description telegraphed to all the frontiers, and the information demanded of the Spanish and Russian embassies was expected every moment.

In order to grasp the history of the crime from its very commencement Monsieur de Malverne decided to visit himself the staircase, the gallery, the platform, and the tower.

He signified to the three companions, who could no longer call themselves the three musketeers, that they were to hold themselves in readiness to accompany him the next day at twelve o'clock on this inspection of the upper regions of the old cathedral.

Perhaps he did not find Mériadec's explanations clear enough so far as concerned his meeting with Sacha at the bottom of the clock-tower. Perhaps, too, he took a bitter pleasure in looking again at this gallery where Odette, unmindful of her honour, had leant over at her lover's side.

However that might be, the Baron de Mériadec and his friends had only to obey, and the next morning at ten o'clock they had met at

Daubrac's rooms in the Hospital, to breakfast there and await the time fixed by the magistrate. They were all three lolling at that same window from which the doctor and Mériadec had seen the veiled woman crossing the precincts on the arm of an unknown cavalier.

This time it was Fabreguette who saw the captain and Monsieur de Pancorbo getting out of a cab at the corner of the Rue d'Arcole, and who pointed them out to his two companions. They saw them going in the direction of the towers, and, without stopping to guess what they were about to do, they rushed in pursuit.

Fabreguette, who had a lively imagination, came to the conclusion that Saint-Briac was a traitor. Mériadec and Daubrac were nearer the truth.

Unfortunately, before reaching the ground, they had eighty-four steps to descend, and the baron, whom his friends did not wish to leave behind, had no longer the same legs as at twenty.

When they entered the staircase of the towers, those of whom they were in pursuit had already arrived on the gallery.

They lost still more time in arguing with the keeper, who told them of his orders, and whom Mériadec was forced to appease by means of a five-franc piece ; so that when they reached the gallery, Pancorbo was just climbing over the balustrade.

He was hidden by the angle of the south tower, and they did not see him. But Fabreguette, who was walking first, at once discovered the captain's body, lying face down, at the foot of the north tower. To rush to it, turn it over, and recognise it was the work of a moment. Mériadec and Daubrac hurried to rescue their unfortunate ally, if there were yet time, and did not think at once of looking for the murderer.

Daubrac knelt down to examine the wound, and stated that Saint-Briac was dead.

Being a doctor, he knew only too well ; and his two friends did not think of disputing his opinion.

"He has killed him from behind, the coward !" cried Fabreguette.

"And yet the captain came here to fight an American duel," murmured Mériadec. "Look ! he is still holding his revolver in his right hand."

"The other man got him here under pretence of an American duel, and he has murdered him, of course."

Daubrac rose, took the revolver, saw that it had not been fired, and cried passionately :

"Now, gentlemen, we must not let this villain escape. He cannot have gone down ; we should have met him on the stairs. Therefore he is not far off, unless, on hearing us come, he went up on to the platform. Well, we will pursue him there. I demand to go first. I am armed, and if he takes it into his head to defend himself with his revolver, I have the means to reply—six shots, and he can only have five, since he used one ball to kill our poor captain with."

Mériadec, in consternation, was silent, but he began to recollect that on the day of the first crime the murderer had found a way of escape without descending the staircase of the tower.

Whilst they were hesitating, grouped around the corpse, the hateful

Pancorbo had climbed over the balustrade, and after having clung to it with his hands, he had succeeded, by dint of strength and dexterity, in bestriding the stone ledge which sloped towards the roof.

He was there, lying flat on his stomach, grasping the narrow ledge with his hands and knees, and was about to let himself slide down, when he heard voices on the gallery. He had thought that he should have had time to conceal himself, and he shuddered on perceiving that he had been wrong in his calculations. But he did not despair, for all that. These people had come up more quickly than he had reckoned, but they were probably loungers, who would only cross the gallery, and would not think of leaning over to measure with their eyes the depth of this kind of ravine between the base of the towers and the nave.

Under these circumstances the fugitive could do nothing better than lie close until these tiresome people had left the place in order to continue their ascent.

And the wretch said to himself :

"Whilst they are climbing up the clock-tower, I will let myself slide down, and before they have arrived on the platform from whence they might see me, I shall, by creeping along the roof, already have reached the small door of the staircase which opens out behind the choir. It will be shut, no doubt, but the first time I went through it I took the precaution of putting the key in my pocket, and fortunately I have it with me now. Come ! I shall get off clear again to-day, and as I shall be out of France to-morrow, that cuckold magistrate will only have his labour for his pains. Instead of pursuing me, he ought to help me to escape for I have just done him a good turn in ridding him of his wife's lover."

"Don't let us waste our time here," said Daubrac, who was still at the other end of the gallery ; "and no false move this time ! Our first care must be to guard the staircase by which we came up. You, Mériadec, will take up your position in front of the door, whilst Fahreguette and I start in pursuit."

"Begin by exploring this gallery, and look out on the roof of the nave," replied Mériadec, turning round to go to his post.

The doctor and the artist followed this sensible advice. They advanced, Fahreguette going first, towards the south tower, examining the area where the reservoirs are situated, and, in order to look on the roof of the nave, they leant over, just above the ledge where the murderer was lying motionless.

They did not see him, but he saw and recognised them, and a storm arose in his brain. He perceived that if they saw him he was lost, and he thought to himself that if he could kill them he was saved. He had his revolver in his pocket, and the heads of his two enemies appeared like two targets close above. He could not miss them. But how could he get hold of his revolver, and how take aim in his present position ? In order to fire, he must loose, at least with one hand, the narrow ledge to which he was clinging, and this ledge hung over an abyss.

"To think that I have them, both of them," he ground out from between his teeth, "and that in less than ten seconds I could send them both to join their friend the captain ! They are evidently alone

on the gallery, and when once I had killed them, I should have nothing to do but escape by the choir staircase."

The temptation was too strong. He felt with his right hand, drawing his leg up a little, to grasp his revolver; he succeeded, not without trouble, in pulling it out; he even got it cocked, and was endeavouring to find a support for his elbow, in order to take good aim, when the sound of the trigger attracted Fabreguette's attention, and he cried at once:

"Hullo! the marquis!"

Daubrac looked, and recognised this man whom he had never seen. Who other than the much looked-for murderer could be perched on the ledge at such a time?

"Here you are at last," continued Fabreguette; "I've been running after you long enough. But you're boxed this time, my man. You can take a walk on the roofs of Notre-Dame, if it pleases you; you won't escape from the mouse-trap. The cathedral is guarded, and at twelve o'clock the magistrate, the commissary, and the detectives will come and collar you."

The artist was still speaking when a bullet took off his red cap, after having grazed his forehead.

"Oh! that's your game?" said he; "you want to kill us now. Pass me the plaything, Daubrac, so that I can send this mad dog on to the pavement where he sent the countess."

"No," replied the doctor, "allow me."

The murderer saw that his death was near, but he would not die alone, and, to steady his aim, he rose and tried to get himself on his knees on the ledge where he had hitherto been lying.

He succeeded, and had already sighted Fabreguette; but just as he was about to press the trigger his left knee slipped and caused him to lose his balance. The bullet flew into the air, and the shooter fell from his perch. He clung for an instant to a gargoyle which projected ten feet below him, but his hands lost hold and he fell, turning over and over, to the foot of the south tower, where he shattered his skull on a large heap of building stones, placed there by a city contractor.

The Countess Xenia was avenged.

"He got his deserts," growled Fabreguette.

"To the devil with him!" said Daubrac.

They called Mériadec, who hastened to them, attracted by the report, and who added nothing to this funeral oration of a scoundrel, of whom no one knew the real name.

Monsieur de Malverne arrived just in time to hear the account of this last scene, and the conclusion he drew from it was that his mission was ended.

"The justice of God is better than the justice of man," he muttered, looking with dry eyes at Jacques de Saint-Briac's body. "It has overtaken the traitor; it will overtake his accomplice, and if I am present then, I shall be sufficiently avenged."

This prayer was heard, and Odette's punishment lasted longer than her guilty loves with the captain.

EPILOGUE.

TEN years have passed since these gloomy events happened, and few people remember them, although they were the sensation of Paris for several months after the final catastrophe. And yet, perhaps, by diligent search, one might find amongst the files of papers belonging to some old collector of criminal records, a long article, published by an influential newspaper about the end of the summer of 1874.

This article, probably written by some high judicial functionary, related the facts and threw light upon several dark passages of an affair which the death of the chief criminal had prevented from being ventilated at the assizes.

It was as follows :—

“The strange and tragic events which so strongly engaged the attention of the Parisian public a few months ago have been, one may say, completely cleared up now ; and it may also be said that the unjust attacks of which an honourable magistrate was the object, with reference to the Notre-Dame crime, had no foundation in truth.

“An individual of Belgian origin, after having travelled about Europe cheating at cards, ended by taking up his quarters in Russia, in the house of a very rich widow whose lover he was, and upon whom he had been preying for several months. He had persuaded her to come and live in France with a legitimate son whom she had by her husband, the Count B., an officer of high rank in the Russian army ; and he resolved to rid himself of the mother and child, in order to appropriate a considerable sum which she had brought with her. He did this on the day after the unfortunate woman's arrival, in the way which is already known, by throwing her from one of the towers of Notre-Dame.

“After having committed this atrocious crime, he succeeded in escaping, and, in consequence of a most regrettable mistake, a retired officer, occupying a good position in Parisian society, was arrested. Set at liberty on the following day, Monsieur de Saint-B. swore to discover the real culprit, and put himself in communication with several persons who had witnessed from a distance the scene on the platform, and of whom one had taken under his protection the unfortunate Countess B.'s deserted child. These gentlemen discovered that the murderer was still living in Paris, under the name of a great Spanish nobleman, the Marquis de P., whom he had met abroad, and whom he was afterwards suspected of having killed.

“This wretch, who had had himself elected a member of a very respectable club, led a double life : in appearance, a man of the world, and in reality, the chief of a band of assassins, of whom one, his tool, charged himself with the murder of the countess's son, a child of nine. This ruffianly subordinate, having succeeded in making his escape abroad, has just been hanged in Vienna for another murder. His master, the false Spaniard, met his end in the way which every one knows. Having succeeded in enticing, on what pretext is not known,

the unfortunate Captain de Saint-B. on to the upper gallery of Notre-Dame, he murdered him, and, surprised at the moment when he was attempting to escape, as he had already done after the countess's murder, he met his due. He fell from a height of forty yards and shattered his skull on the pavement.

"It was following these catastrophes that Monsieur de M., examining magistrate on the Tribunal of the Seine, thought it his duty to resign those functions, and to voluntarily quit the magistrature. Although from the beginning to the end of this sinister business he conscientiously performed his duty, the tragic death of his friend, Monsieur de Saint-B., had so affected him that he resolved to give up his position before the usual age and to live henceforward in retirement. He devoted himself entirely to study, and undertook a great work on the architecture of the Middle Ages, which occupied all his time. Madame de M., the worthy companion of his life, consoles him, by associating herself with his labours, for having given up a career in which the most brilliant future awaited him.

"This disposes of certain ill-natured rumours which have been circulated as to the cause of the premature retirement of one of our most distinguished magistrates. To-day the world recognises to the full his conduct and the spotless virtue of Madame de M., whose name for a moment was most unjustly connected with the sad history of a series of unheard-of crimes."

Did public opinion undergo any change after the publication of this species of apology? It is difficult to pronounce now on this delicate point, but it is certain that the excitement quieted down, and people began to forget this drama in several acts which so occupied the minds of Parisians.

Those who had played a part in it, and who knew the truth, were too good-hearted not to preserve the most absolute secrecy with regard to Madame de Malverne's sin.

Even Jean Fabreguette controlled his tongue. For the guilty woman expiation had commenced; the outraged husband revenged himself cruelly, and she did not dare to complain, because she knew well that her punishment was well-deserved.

Of all those which he might have inflicted, Monsieur de Malverne chose the most refined. Instead of driving her forth, he had imprisoned her; not that he made a dungeon of his house, but in threatening to make public, if she tried to escape him, the treason of Saint-Briac, the only man she had ever loved, the lover whom she unceasingly wept, Monsieur de Malverne had bound her to himself. He never left her for a moment, and allowed her to see no one. And to the life which he had imposed on her he had added another torture. Under pretence that she was interested in archæological researches into Gothic churches, he took her every day to Notre-Dame; they ascended the tower together as far as the gallery; he took her to the place where Jacques de Saint-Briac had fallen, and said: "There he died, and it was you who killed him. He was loyal, and you breathed treachery in his ear. God has punished him. It is right that you should suffer a thousand times more than he suffered."

And the unhappy Odette did not rebel against her tormentor. Resigned and penitent, she awaited the time when he should tire of torturing her or death take her. She awaited it as a deliverance.

One day at the beginning of autumn, Monsieur de Malverne and his wife were stopped in front of the porch of Notre-Dame by a procession. Wedding carriages barred the way. Odette, seized by a presentiment, looked and saw entering the cathedral Rose Verdière, on Mériadec's arm. Rose Verdière clad in white and crowned with orange-flowers. And it was not the baron who was going to marry her; he was only there to supply the place of old Verdière, who had left this world at a most convenient time. After the bride came the bridegroom, Albert Daubrac, escorting a good lady, looking as respectable as provincial—his mother, arrived from Agen expressly to be present at the wedding. Fabreguette and a doctor were groom's-men.

None of them recognised this woman, veiled as she was on the day of the first ascent to the fatal gallery; none of them noticed Monsieur de Malverne, looking ten years older and mixed up in the crowd.

The procession entered the nave, and when it had passed, Odette said to her husband:

"Do not drag me up there. It is useless. I feel I am dying, and I shall die without regret, since she is happy, the noble girl who tried to sacrifice herself for me."

The magistrate had pity. He took her home, where the heart-disease which had been undermining her health for the last six months put an end to her life.

Had he time to forgive her? God alone knows, for he had no other friends.

* * * * *

Monsieur and Madame Daubrac have three charming children, and are perfectly happy. Their adventure ended like a fairy-tale. The little house-surgeon at the Hospital has taken his degree and is in a fair way to become famous; the flower-maker is the most charming of wives and the best of mothers. She is no longer the *Angel of the chimes*, she is the Angel of the fireside.

Mériadec died a bachelor; but he found at their house a family which was sufficient to make him happy.

Fabreguette has had pictures in the Salon for the last four years, and he is looking for a medal at the coming Exhibition.

They are all happy in their lives, and the grass grows on the forgotten graves of Odette and Jacques de Saint-Briac.

To every man shall be done according to his works.

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